OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

20th ANNIVERSARY

THE MAKING OF THEME PARK
BEHIND THE SCENES OF BULLFROG'S CLASSIC SIM

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WHY WE'RE STILL EGGCITED BY THE HIT PLATFORMER

SUPER MONKEY BALL

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SEGA'S BANANAS PARTY GAME
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HOW A RAPPING PUPPY AND PLASTIC PERIPHERALS DEFINED A GENRE

ULTIMATE GUIDE: YAKUZA
WHY SEGA'S AMBITIOUS PS2 TITLE IS MORE THAN JUST A GTA CLONE

STRICTLY LIMITED GAMES
MEET THE PUBLISHER WITH A FIERCE LOVE FOR RETRO GAMING

THE MAKING OF MAUI MALLARD
WHAT HAPPENED WHEN DONALD DUCK BECAME A NINJA?

PLUS
MORTAL KOMBAT II
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PARTY GAME?

DARRAN JONES

It's no longer practical to play 16-player *Halo* matches, so I'm going to go with the chaotic brawls of *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Double Dragon Neon*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Like I say (said? The timeline is confusing) later in the mag, I had a whole lot of fun playing the somewhat maligned *Micro Machines V4* during lunchtimes with three others. They wouldn't let me use the upgraded cars I'd unlocked though, tut.
Currently playing: *Final Fantasy XIII*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

I love anything in the *Bishi Bashi* series, it's always a lot of fun watching people frantically slapping buttons.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Ravv Danger*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

There was a period in the mid to late-Noughties when *Guitar Hero* wasn't just a party game, it became the reason to have an actual party. Not that I ever played it much myself… it's not a *Total War* game, lol.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*… Modded of course
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

IAIN LEE

Any of the original *Micro Machines* games. Load that up and you have an evening of absolute mayhem and laughter. Still stands up, incredibly fast and ridiculous.
Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it.
Currently playing: *Bust-A-Move* (SNES)
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

PAUL DRURY

I do love four-player *Warlords* on the Atari 2600, especially if I bag top left, but my favourite party game is the brilliant and bonkers *Bishi Bashi Special*.
Expertise: George Opperman's ties
Currently playing: *Super Missile Attack*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

GRAEME MASON

My sons and I regularly cause mayhem with a madcap session of *Metal Slug* or *Metal Slug 2*. Heavy machine gun!
Expertise: Adjusting a tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Kingdom Rush: Origins*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

When *Micro Machines 2* came out its multiplayer made it a favourite in a flat I shared, and I still love it now. Its chaotic courses just make it so easy to gain or lose lead position.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Lode Runner*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ADAM BARNES

I genuinely mean this when I say it: *Shrek Super Party*. It's *Mario Party* but with Lord Farquaad, and therefore amazing.
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Currently playing: *Planet Coaster*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

LOADING...

We all have moments when we feel old and this month's cover star is certainly making me feel my age. I can remember encountering *Super Monkey Ball* like it was yesterday and I can still hear the screams of rage and the howls of laughter that accompanied the many games of Monkey Target and Monkey Golf I would play with my mates. Shockingly, both those memories happened around 20 years ago. Dang, Sega's cute simians are getting old.

And yet, while those delightful little critters may be getting on in age, they've certainly done well for themselves, spawning several games over the last two decades, including a brand-new HD remaster of the first three console releases, *Super Monkey Ball*, *Super Monkey Ball 2* and *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe*, which we discuss this issue with the game's director Masao Shirosaki. The game itself remains as fresh as the day it was conceived and we've had a lot of fun revisiting the GameCube classic in the process of putting this feature together.

Worry not though, for if rolling a cute monkey in a ball isn't your thing we've got plenty of other retro goodness for you, including an in-depth look at *Nodes Of Yesod*, a collector's guide for the Mega-CD, the creation of Bullfrog's sensational *Theme Park*, the story of *Maui Mallard* and much, much more.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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Paul used to think we were in one big gaming tribe, but smaller tribes still exist and some aren't Spectrum friendly

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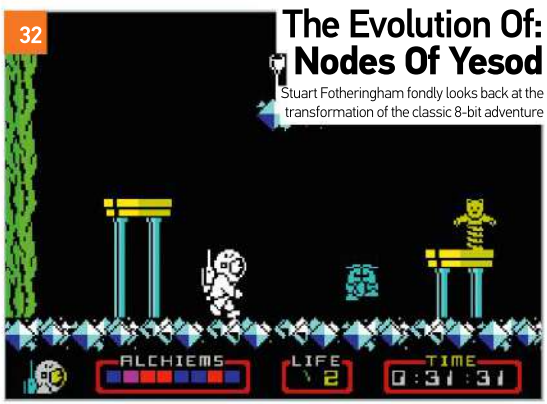
We celebrate 20 years of Sega's fantastic party game and find out from Masao Shirosaki how it's being updated with a new remaster



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The Evolution Of: Nodes Of Yesod

Stuart Fotheringham fondly looks back at the transformation of the classic 8-bit adventure

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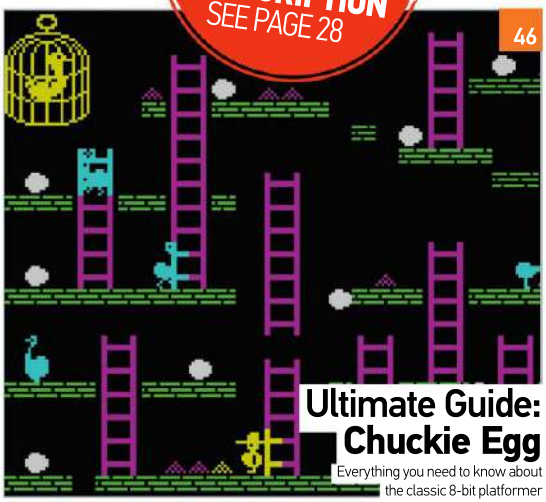

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We've had another selection of delightful letters, please keep sending them in to us

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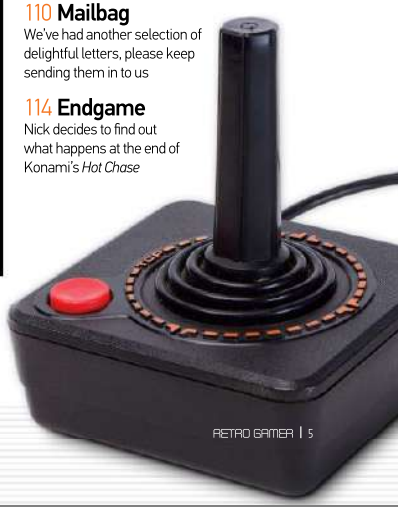
Discover how one of Bullfrog's youngest members was behind this gigantic hit



SMELLS GOOD

» Each issue has a selection of puzzle pages, including a Where's Waluigi spread. Can you find him?

We chat to Paul Murphy about the Kickstarter-based magazine Ninty Fresh

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Paul Murphy chats to us about the popular Nintendo mag *Ninty Fresh*

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Has gaming changed since you were young? It's certainly transformed for Iain

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We speak to Tim Lapetino about his new book which celebrates the 40th anniversary of an arcade icon

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick travels back to December 2004. Will be remember what he got for Christmas?

Paul Murphy is a busy man and one who has a clear love for both magazine craft and anything Nintendo-based. His latest co-venture is the popular *Ninty Fresh*, a magazine that's dedicated to all things Nintendo and is currently celebrating its fifth issue. While it covers all modern aspects of the popular Kyoto-based giant, *Ninty Fresh* is also packed with excellent retro content about Nintendo systems, making it rather unique in magazine circles at the moment.

Paul explained to us how it all came about. "We already produce a monthly A5 magazine called *Switch Player*, which itself spun off from our PlayStation Vita venture, *Vitamag*. *Switch Player* is locked into its format through pricing we can't change, and so a bigger, more ambitious Nintendo magazine was not only needed, but we saw there would be an audience for it. With such a huge amount of history to draw from as well as a platform being in rude health, to me it made sense to have something that drew from both of those elements."

Paul and the team had already had a lot of success with crowdfunding due to *Switch Player*, so following the same funding format for the team's new mag made a lot of sense. But what's the appeal of continuing to go down this route? "Crowdfunding has been a phenomenal way for all creators to get out there and make something," continues Paul. "It opens the door for anyone to get out there and make something happen. And as is the case with many other ventures, if the product captures enough interest or is good enough, you'll grow an audience."

It's not all about reach however, as it critically means you'll not be wasting your unneeded time or money on a product that could fall flat. "It also allows you to minimise your risk – by charging upfront you have a guaranteed audience for your next production. I couldn't risk making the magazine and it not selling, but I can offset and micro-manage every element of the issue because the budget is in essence, preset."

Crowdfunding has led to a large number of gaming magazines, both new and retro-based and it sometimes feels that there are more available

» We've seen four issues of *Ninty Fresh* so far and it's an entertaining read. We look forward to future issues.

» Although features are often light on interviews they still manage to go deep on the items in question.

» Some of the cool pixel art really brings the magazine spreads to life.

» One of the things we enjoy about *Ninty Fresh* is its distinctive artwork. Issue 4's *Zelda* article has some cracking examples.

» Here's the *Ninty Fresh* team (from left to right) Ben Bulbeck, Bobby Jack, Paul Murphy, Aaron Potter, Lewis Parker, Nate Ellingsworth and Benjamin Hayhoe.

online than there are in shops. "I'm not privy to what happens at big publishers, but I would wager that the outlay versus what is recouped in sales plays its part," offers Paul when asked why online magazines are thriving. "There's a huge interest in print media and there will always be those (like myself) that simply prefer it, but the internet wins every day of the week in terms of reach, and pricing, since it's almost always free."

And yet both *Ninty Fresh* and *Switch Player* have found solid audiences and show no sign of disappearing. *Ninty Fresh* in particular feels extremely strong for such a recent magazine, and it's obvious that the team has taken its knowledge from crafting *Switch Player* and applied it to create something a little different from most other magazines. But why does it stand out so well? "The obvious one for me is that it's one of the only ways to get that much Nintendo coverage in print," Paul says. "**Retro Gamer** does an amazing job of covering retro Nintendo content, but as a multiformat publication you only have a certain amount you can do on a month by month basis. *Edge* are essentially the only other mainstream publication still standing and again is multiformat. Those looking for that dose of Nintendo coverage are either making do with the slim pickings with shared coverage, or look to those making enthusiast publications."

Paul also tells us that the distinctive look and feel of *Ninty Fresh* can be traced back to one magazine in particular. "I grew up with *Super Play*, and the art was off the chart and set the tone for the whole magazine – and that's something I wanted to achieve here," he admits. "We are a fan-made product, but want to feel like we are much more than that, and to have a look, style and tone that everyone loves. As well as having interesting features and analysis!"

***Ninty Fresh* follows in the footsteps of *Super Play* in numerous ways, but one of the most notable ones is its unique covers (although here they're drawn by a number of artists rather than *Super Play*'s Wil Overton).** This great art continues throughout the mag and Paul tells us that everyone is compensated for their hard work. "Everyone gets something for their contribution, written or created," he says. "Our creative editor (Jon Doyle) does an amazing job in finding artists within the budget he is set, and we have essentially crafted the art around the words for the last couple of issues too. It's quite difficult at times, and even harder to do something that **Retro Gamer** does without looking like we are imitating."

Planning content for a retro magazine is always a tricky process, but it can also be enjoyable as Paul has discovered. "As we start the planning stage for each issue we always have a discussion around what will fit, from the games that we loved," he explains.

"As it's the 20th anniversary of *Animal Crossing* launching, we will feature that iconic title in the next issue, and it kind of flows from there. We have also been tackling each system in turn per issue and it is the turn of the Nintendo 64 next. After the amazing job you did last time out, we have our work cut out."

As entertaining as *Ninty Fresh* is to read each month each issues is often a little light on developer-based content, but this is something that Paul hopes to change going forward. "Our contacts and routes to developers past and present need some serious work," he admits to us. "We have had some great names in the magazine so far (and managed to secure Jennifer Hale for issue 5) but we would love to have a discussion with some of the people behind our favourite franchises."

We're sure it's only a matter of time before that happens and in the meantime *Ninty Fresh* manages to be one of the most fun and enjoyable Nintendo-based magazines around. Give it a try and find out for yourself.

Ninty Fresh is on sale now for £5.99 and is available from nintyfresh.net.

CASTLEVANIA GOES MEGA

The Mega Drive homebrew scene has been quite busy lately, but few projects are as ambitious as what YouTuber Pigsy is currently planning. They're attempting to recreate *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* on Sega's console and early work is looking pretty good. There's a long way to go still, but Pigsy already appears to be nailing the look of the game. You can find out more by heading to YouTube and searching for Pigsy's retro game dev tutorials.

KOTOR RETURNS

Fans of the acclaimed Xbox game *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* will be pleased to hear that it's making a return. Developed by Aspyr and launching on PC and PS5 (as a timed exclusive) it's being remade from the ground up and promises to stay faithful to the original Xbox classic. No in-game footage has been released yet, but hopefully more information will be revealed in the coming months. We can't wait to play it.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Among all of us

I've just finished an hour-long session on Impostor, the new mode on *Fortnite*. It's yet another in a lengthy list of *Among Us* clones. It's fun and me and my two boys laughed a lot as we bluffed, double bluffed and triple bluffed our way through eliminating each other every round. Last week I was playing *Goose, Goose, Duck* – which is, yup, you guessed it, a copy of *Among Us*. Is that how it works now? You're allowed to copy any game you want and not get done for it?

It reminds me of when we used to holiday in Zakynthos. Every night we'd head to the main square because there was good food and rides for the kids. All of them had Disney characters painted on the side. Now, I am no expert, but I find it hard to believe these blokes who didn't seem to like kids, despite making their living out of them, had legitimate contracts with the Disney corporation to license Goofy and Minnie Mouse.

I love playing games with my kids. And during lockdown, I let them play way more than before. Every now and then *The Daily Mail* or some right-wing radio station will tell us that videogames are evil and ruining kids' minds. When the global pandemic hit and we were all forced to stay indoors, I found them to be a lifesaver for the mental health of my boys who were eight and ten at the time. With the press of a button and the donning of a headset, the absolute depressing tedium and aching fear of imminent death and loneliness was eradicated.

While I was going mad, thinking this was the end of the world and it was just a matter of time before we all died, curled up in my bed, sobbing and worrying I couldn't get any paracetamol or thermometers, my kids were having the time of their lives with their mates online. *Fortnite, Roblox, Rocket League*. We should have been outside clapping them every Thursday. (I should put a side note in, this is in NO WAY to take away from the magic of the NHS, shop workers, delivery drivers and the like… I just think we should pay them with actual money instead of applause). Those games may have just saved the mental health of a generation.

When I was young, games were often an isolating experience. You'd sit at home, on your own, playing for hours on end. Maybe you had a buddy round and you'd take it in turns. I do wonder if the people who say games are dangerous are thinking about *Horace Goes Skiing* and *Castle Of Gems* rather than the magnificence of what we have now (including all the *Among Us* clones).

I'm gonna do it, cos to the best of my knowledge, no one else has. Games developers, shops, magazines and everyone connected with industry – thank you. Thank you for helping me, my boys and so many millions of people stay in touch when we were literally being ordered to not have contact with anyone.

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Tribes within tribes

Shortly before settling down to write this month's missive, I received some backlash on social media over a recent Retro Gamer column, in which I extolled the virtues of the ZX Spectrum over the Commodore 64.

Though it all resolved relatively amicably, once I explained that I had just been doing a big silly, I remained taken aback by how seriously my column had been taken. I am a man well into middle age, with myriad more important things going on in my life than caring whether anyone thinks my (admittedly beloved) thing that I owned when I was 13 was or wasn't better than another thing that other people owned.

Presumably, most of you reading this would have left school decades ago. I had thought we were so far beyond the sort of mine's-better-than-yours home computer arguments of yore that nobody could possibly ever have taken that column at face value.

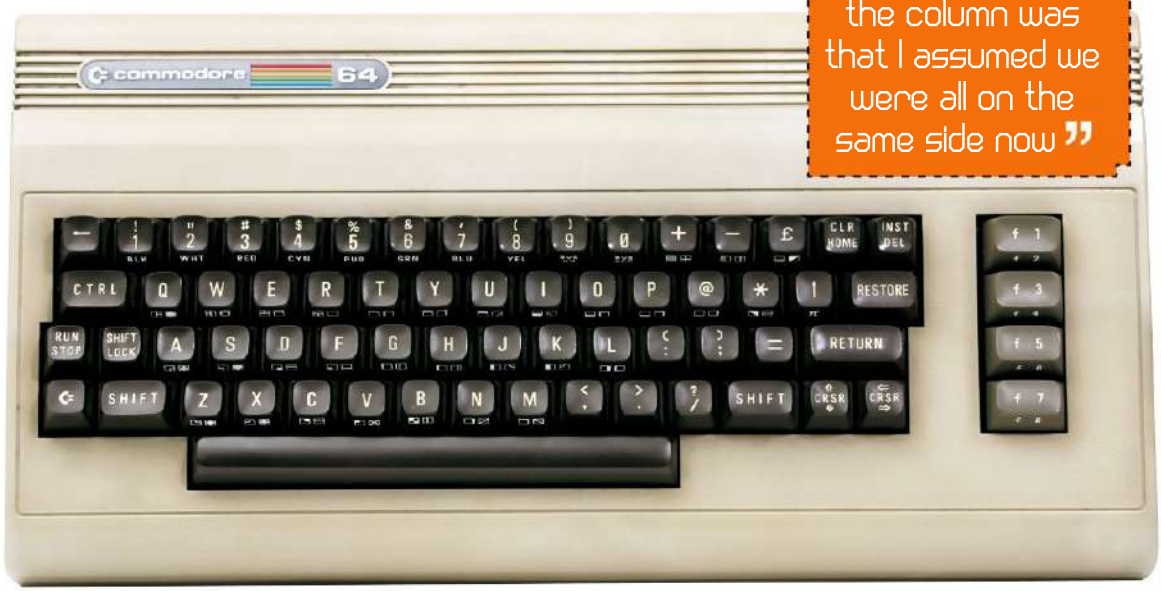
And yet… they did, to the point that I got called a few rude names. My mother would've been shocked. Now, I'm not for a second saying that anybody who got offended was wrong to get offended. We feel what we feel, and some scars run deep. If I'm totally honest with myself, yes… I probably still have a bit of resentment towards those kids at school whose parents could afford to buy them a BBC Model B. It's buried, but it's still in there.

Yet, all of this highlighted for me the tribalism that runs through us all, to a greater or lesser extent. We're all slaves to the programming baked into our evolutionary DNA, and we're predisposed towards finding a tribe. Strength in numbers, shared resources etc. And of course, the tendency of tribes to unite against outside tribes in a violent fashion. I don't know if there has ever been an anthropological study of gamers, but there should be.

The point I'm reaching towards here is that so much time has passed now that I don't see myself as a ZX Spectrum owner anymore, because that tribe has been whittled down over the decades to the point of extinction. I see myself as part of a larger tribe now – sharing resources with a larger retro gaming community. I might joke about the Commodore 64 or the Amiga, but in my mind time has eroded our differences to the point where we're all just old gamers. That's the tribe now. We can sit round the campfire discussing the merits of both *Impossible Mission* AND *Atic Atac*.

The mistake I'd made in writing the column was that I assumed we were all on the same side now. Unfortunately, we all know what assume makes of you and me, and it turns out that there are tribes within tribes. Old gamers we may be, but I guess some of us hang onto our old formative allegiances. Anyway, I just want to say sorry if you were offended by that column. The Commodore 64 was a wonderful machine, with myriad virtues, and foremost among them was the distinction of being the brownest technology ever invented.

> "The mistake I'd made in writing the column was that I assumed we were all on the same side now"



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Tim Lapetino

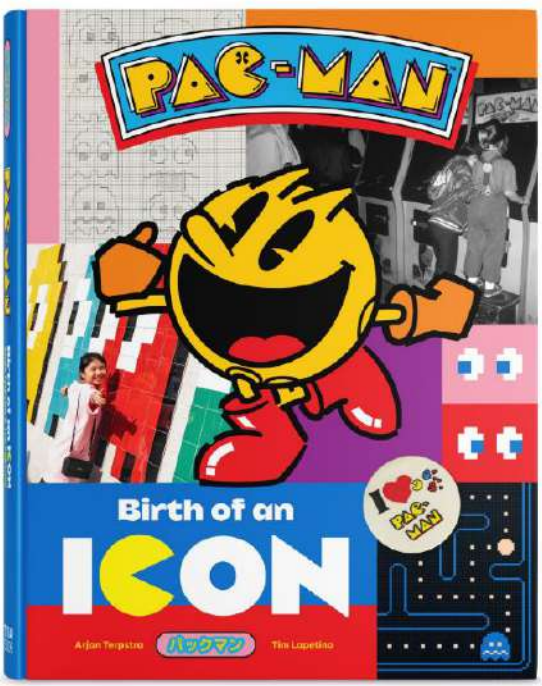
The author of a new book celebrating Pac-Man tells Paul Drury about 40 years of eating dots

Writer, designer and 'geek historian' Tim Lapetino is co-author of *Pac-Man: Birth Of An Icon*, which delves deep into the game's creation and its cultural impact across four decades. He spent all of 2020 playing over a hundred versions of the game and exploring the crazy world of the series' memorabilia. You can share his journey on Twitter @365ofpac. Tim is also the author of the best-selling book, *Art Of Atari*.

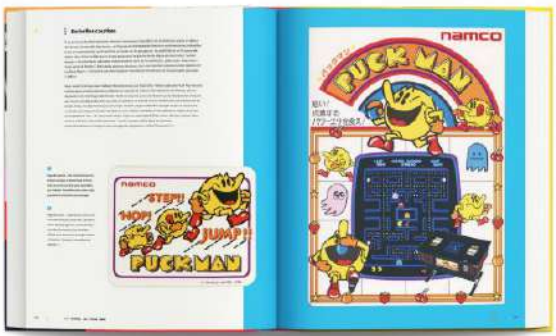
Pac-Man turned 40 last year. Why is he still such an icon?
I think the foundation of Pac-Man's lasting power is the game itself. The gameplay, the design and the overall challenge are still something that players find fun and engaging four decades on. The design choices by Toru Iwatani's team were particular and specifically minimal and that's meant the game has aged well visually, too.

You actually managed to speak to the 'father of *Pac-Man*', Toru Iwatani, for the book.
Yeah, it was fun to dig in with him about the cultural context, of how he felt about the times, his playful spirit and what was happening around him in Japan in the Seventies. I think his desire to make a game that was focused on less violent play, to open up the experience to more than just "sweaty guys", as he called them, was key. As a sweaty guy myself, I can relate… [Me too – Ed]

You also highlight the contribution of other team members, whose role has often been overlooked.
Toru Iwatani has always been the face of the game and I think it's still appropriate to see him as the mastermind behind *Pac-Man* but he was also willing to let the creatives on the rest of the team really add to the overall design and vision. Like Shigeo Funaki – he took this super simple instruction, "Please have the monsters chase the player from all sides instead of simply following from behind like a string of beads," and turned it into this fascinating set of algorithms where the ghosts move independently through the maze and have differing relationships with the player and Pac-Man. Without his programming expertise in executing this basic idea, the game would just die.



» If you thought you knew everything about the *Pac-Man* franchise, think again...



» Calling the game *Puck-Man* and giving our yellow hero a large, phallic nose... what could possibly have gone wrong?

» The book has lots of examples of the weird and wonderful world of *Pac-Man* merch.

While you were doing research for the book, did anything surprise you in terms of the game's creation?
One of the things we suspected – and discovered – was that there were plenty of features and ideas for the game that were never implemented. Some of them were coded and discarded, and some never went beyond the pencil and notepad stage. They discussed things like opening and closing 'sliding doors' throughout the maze, which was deemed too complicated. Even the ghost pen in the middle of the playfield initially had an opening door in it, letting the ghosts out after a specific number of dots were eaten, an idea that shows up in later versions. Another idea was the notion that Pac-Man could fire at the enemy! Plenty of things were left on the cutting room floor.

Your book has a fascinating section on the role Midway played in the success of *Pac-Man*.
They were hugely influential and important. Midway had really gotten noticed by the rest of the industry and when they brought *Pac-Man* over, they had the manufacturing, the distribution and the marketing to really jump on the game when it became such a phenomenon so quickly. I'm not sure that Namco would've been able to handle that. *Pac-Man* was only a moderate success in Japan at first and I think Namco was as surprised as anyone with how it took off in America.

» You may remember Tim from issue 179's excellent *Pac-Man* article that he wrote for us.

» Tim's book looks at all areas of Namco's famous series, including weird fashion.

» Tim's definitive *Art Of Atari* shines a light on the pioneering work of the company.

The West really took the game to their hearts, as shown by the huge amount of spin-off products that followed…

I think the licensing and merchandising of *Pac-Man* was a significant part of keeping the game and brand popular. Some of the fun stuff we unearthed were a German 7-inch vinyl version of the *Pac-Man Fever* song, a soap set where Pac-Man was the sponge and the ghosts were each moulded, coloured bars of soap, and a super rare Ms Pac-Man doll made by an Italian company called Fibra, which looked just like the American Saturday morning cartoon characters. Some of the Midway folks I interviewed told me about a product that never made it beyond prototype stage: a Pac-Man toilet seat! Just imagine Pac-Man opening his mouth and... well, you get the idea. Seems like it could probably traumatise little kids. The guy I talked to had brought it home and toilet trained his kids on it but it was never available for retail, sadly, at least as far as I know. That would be my *Pac-Man* Holy Grail.

» The collector's edition of the book comes with a special yellow vinyl version of that song.

This isn't the first book you have written. Tell us about *Art Of Atari*.

It began as a personal itch I wanted to scratch. Even though I'm a writer, most of my professional career has been as a graphic designer and creative director. I've spent many years designing logos for corporations and organisations, and the logo design field has its own pantheon of famous designs, like Carolyn Davidson's Nike swoosh, the IBM logo by Paul Rand, the Apple logo designed by Rob Janoff… and the Atari logo is a great design, fit to exist among those. It's still very recognisable today but very few people knew much about the man behind that logo, George Opperman. What was his story and what was his role at the company? How did it dovetail into the artwork I grew up with, both on the sides of Atari's arcade cabinets and on the packaging of the Atari 2600 game cartridges? I was able to break through to some answers in a way that many other fan-historians hadn't been able to.

Your book chronicles how Atari really blazed a trail in those early days of videogame art.

They really understood how to sell and market games. They weren't talking about technical specs or numbers or colours – they were telling small parts of the stories of these games on the packages, using illustration to really bridge the gap between the simple gameplay and the emotions you'd feel if you were playing tennis, or flying in a spacecraft. The art served as an important bridge to connect people emotionally to these new games and gave them a hook to this pretty new technology. It was an essential element of the brand experience, as we'd say today.

Have you a favourite piece of Atari art?

George Opperman's *Missile Command* is one of my favourites. It's such a beautiful piece from a design perspective, with these huge missiles flying in and out of the frame, and the excellent layout. It's beautifully painted and looks so much like the Seventies version of the future. Even if you know nothing about that game, this painting tells a story that you can cobble together in your mind, leaving a lasting impression and a sense of the drama behind it.

You can visit timlapetino.com/ writing for more on Tim's work and to order his beautiful books. *Pac-Man* photos © Cook And Becker and Bandai Namco. Atari photos © Dynamite Entertainment and Atari. Thanks to Codi Palm for the headshot.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

DECEMBER 2004 – Nobody is taking any chances this Christmas, with safe bets and sequels galore. Still, they represent a wealth of treats for players of any system, as you'll soon see. Nick Thorpe doesn't get overwhelmed by time travel, but he might be by all these games

NEWS DECEMBER 2004

On 15 December, David Blunkett resigned as Home Secretary. His affair with publisher Kimberly Quinn had been exposed months earlier, but fresh allegations that he fast tracked a visa application for Quinn's nanny ultimately led to his political downfall

£26.5 million in cash was stolen from the headquarters of Northern Bank in Belfast on 20 December. Bank employees Chris Ward and Kevin McMullan were forced to co-operate with the robbers, with gunmen having taken Ward's family and McMullan's wife as hostages. The Provisional IRA was widely blamed for the robbery, but denied any involvement. Though nobody has been convicted of the crime itself, financial adviser Ted Cunningham was found guilty of money laundering in 2014 in connection to the robbery.

A 9.1 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia occurred on 26 December. The earthquake was the largest since the 1964 Alaskan earthquake, and remains the largest of the 21st Century. Deadly tsunami waves then hit a number of nations in the aftermath, resulting in an estimated death toll of over 227,000 people, primarily in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. Significant numbers of people were also displaced by damage done in the Maldives, Malaysia, and even as far away as Somalia. By the end of the year, UK charities had raised £50 million in aid of the victims.

[PS2] Bigger world, better aiming – who cares? *San Andreas* let us go to the barber and upgrade our haircut.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 2004

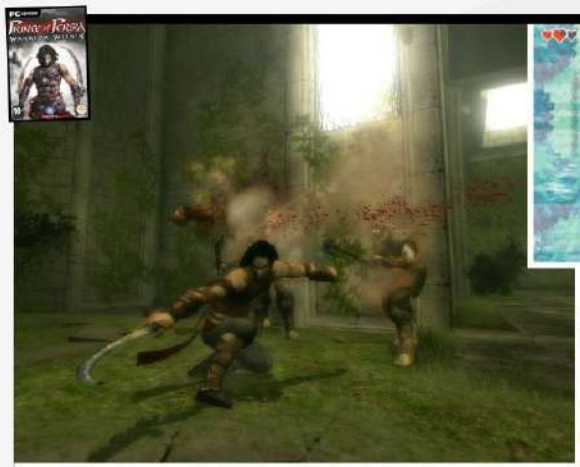
Christmas is a time of peace and goodwill – unless you're in the ruthless business of selling consoles. That's probably why the PS2, still comfortably ahead of its rivals, boasted so many compelling exclusives. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was "bigger, more diverse and more freeform than any other videogame", according to the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, which gave it 10/10. *Edge*'s 9/10 review noted that despite flaws, the game was "buoyed by the kind of ambition that sees most games crumbling under the weight of it all". *GamesMaster* added a 98% score to the list of accolades too – all of which made rival crime sim *The Getaway: Black Monday* (3/10 *Edge*, 8/10 *OPS2*, 71% *GM*) look rather second rate. Fans of manly grappling could pick up *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw* (8/10 *OPS2*, 88% *GM*). *Jak 3* (6/10 *Edge*, 8/10 OPS2, 86% *GM*) and *Ratchet & Clank 3* (8/10 *Edge*, 9/10 *OPS2*, 90% *GM*) had the kids covered for platforming and shooting, and families could get together with *Singstar Party* (8/10 *OPS2*, 82% *GM*) or *EyeToy Play 2* (8/10 *Edge*, 8/10 *OPS2*, 84% *GM*).

At a time when every publisher looked to bring out their big guns, *Halo 2* certainly featured plenty of them. According to the *Official Xbox Magazine*, the long awaited exclusive "doesn't try to revolutionise the FPS", but instead "takes all the features the fans loved and gives them a fresh and crowd-pleasing upgrade", which was good for a full 10/10 score. *Edge* felt that the game's ending was so abrupt that "it is likely that the one overriding emotion you'll feel on completion is that of having been cheated", but that the combat "continues to amaze" and gave the game 9/10. *GamesMaster* also awarded the game 95%. Also prominent this holiday season was *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II - The Sith Lords*. The RPG sequel earned 9.3/10 from *OXM*, which felt that it "takes all that was good from *KOTOR*, places it in a far more oppressive place, then throws you in to deal with it".

Over on the GameCube, Nintendo was pinning its hopes on *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, the sequel to its stunning first-person adventure. This earned 8/10 from *Edge* and 90% from *GamesMaster*, but the highest praise came from *NGC*, which awarded the game 94% and praised the "gradual sense of empowerment" and the

[Xbox] Even if the campaign ending was a tad disappointing, *Halo 2* was a riot on Xbox Live.

[GameCube] *Metroid Prime 2* offered all the adventuring fun of the original, but now with much more purple.



[PC] There's blood, dark environments and Godsmack on the soundtrack – just what every mid-Noughties teen wants.

[GBA] *The Minish Cap* was Capcom's second go at the *Zelda* franchise, following the *Oracle* games.

[PS2] With so many dark games doing the rounds, *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* added a welcome splash of colour.

"scale and imagination" of the game, while criticising its dark environments. *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* scored 8/10 in *Edge* and 91% in *NGC*. It also received 90% from *GamesMaster*, which enjoyed the "depth of character rarely seen since *Wind Waker*". RPG fans could also opt for Namco's *Tales Of Symphonia* (84% *NGC*, 84% *GM*), now officially available in the UK.

Those preferring to play on computers would likely have been lured by the charms of *Football Manager 2005*, hailed by *PC Gamer* as "a new name for a blissful, unrelenting obsession", in a 90% review. The strategically inclined may also have been tempted by *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* (88% *PC Gamer*, 84% *GM*), while those up for multiplayer carnage would have enjoyed *Tribes: Vengeance* (7/10 *Edge*, 88% *PC Gamer*). Of course, some players just needed to escape to a new world – maybe that of *Final Fantasy XI* (8/10 *Edge*, 90% *GamesMaster*) or *A Tale In The Desert II* (83%, *PC Gamer*).

The big multiplatform releases were predominantly sequels too. *Prince Of Persia: The Warrior Within* (7/10 *Edge*, 9/10 *OPS2*, 91% *PC Gamer*) offered an edgier, more combat oriented take on the action adventure formula, *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* (8/10 *OPS2*, 8.5/10 *OXM*, 82% *NGC*) continued open world extreme sports and *Mortal Kombat: Deception* (8.9/10 *OXM*, 80% *GM*) further refined the series in 3D. *X-Men Legends* (6/10 *OPS2*, 8.5/10 *OXM*, 80% *NGC*) offered a surprisingly good blend of beat-'em-up and RPG, *Need For Speed Underground 2* (8/10 *OPS2*, 7.5/10 *OXM*, 69% *NGC*) provided reasonable neon-lit street racing, and *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* (5/10 *Edge*, 60% *GM*) disappointed everyone by not being the N64 game.

Game Boy Advance owners were treated to *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap*, a classic 2D entry filled with size-shifting shenanigans, which scored 91% in both *GamesMaster* and *NGC*, with the latter noting that despite an early feeling that "it's all too familiar", the game "rarely fails to surprise". Treasure's beat-'em-up sequel *Advance Guardian Heroes* (6/10 *Edge*, 74% *NGC*) suffered performance problems, but *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* (89% *NGC*) was amongst the developer's best ever games. Even N-Gage owners got a treat too, as the wartime strategy game *Pathway To Glory* earned 8/10 in *Edge*, which praised the "surprisingly gutsy" presentation and an interface described as "a masterpiece of functional minimalism".

Speaking of portable gaming, both new handhelds hit Japan this month. The Nintendo DS got off to a slow start on 2 December, while Sony's PSP launched to first day sales of 200,000 units ten days later. UK magazines had still yet to review anything on import, so that will have to wait for 2005 – and that's where we'll pick up next time.

CHARTS

DECEMBER 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
2 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
3 – Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Konami)
4 – Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 (EA)
5 – Burnout 3: Takedown (EA)

XBOX

1 – Halo 2 (Microsoft)
2 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
3 – The Lord Of The Rings: The Third Age (EA)
4 – Burnout 3: Takedown (EA)
5 – Men Of Valor: The Vietnam War (Vivendi)

PC

1 – The Sims 2 (EA)
2 – Rome: Total War (Activision)
3 – Total Club Manager 2005 (EA)
4 – Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War (THQ)
5 – Call Of Duty: United Offensive (Activision)

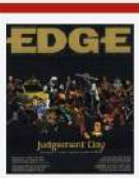
MUSIC

1 – Do They Know It's Christmas (Band Aid 20)
2 – Father And Son (Ronan Keating ft. Yusuf)
3 – I Believe In You (Kylie Minogue)
4 – You Can Do It (Ice Cube ft. Mack 10 & Ms Toi)
5 – I Got You Babe/Soda Pop (Merrion/McCall/Kensit)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official Xbox Mag

Darren Forman, winner of the European Master Ninja Tournament in *Ninja Gaiden*, has gone to Japan for the finals and met Tomonobu Itagaki. "Someone who tells reviewers that they couldn't tell a good game if it was stapled to their ass with a nailgun [...] shouldn't be so incredibly nice to lowly peons such as ourselves. Yet he was!"



Edge

The Golden Joysticks have been and gone, and *Edge* felt "it was difficult to feel that compere Matt Lucas was earning his no doubt astronomical appearance fee". Ouch. *Doom 3* won both PC Game Of The Year and Ultimate Game Of The Year, while *Burnout 3*, *Fable* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash* won on the PS2, Xbox and Gamecube respectively.

NGC

It's issue 100, and former editor Martin Kitts is proud of "cultivating mag personalities such as Kittsy The Serial Killer, Greener The Giant Man and Jes, Frontman Of Aqua." He also recalls a trip to Atlanta for E3, staying in "the most dangerous part of the city", with "managers staying across town in a five-star Radisson". That's why we never go to E3.

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Barnstorming

SPEEDING WITH CONSEQUENCES

» ATARI 2600 » 1982 » ACTIVISION

One of the things I love about growing up with videogames is that everything in the Eighties felt fresh and exciting. Even though systems like the Atari 2600 now look graphically primitive by today's standards, their games often have superb mechanics that feel absolutely timeless. Steve Cartwright's *Barnstorming* is one such example and I'd love to see it make a comeback.

The concept behind *Barnstorming* is simplicity itself – you simply take your biplane and fly it through a set number of barns in as quick a time as possible. Despite how basic that sounds, there's a little bit more to it, meaning it's an easy game to pick up and play, but is also one that packs a real challenge.

Barnstorming's trickiness comes from the numerous hazards that get in your way, from low-flying geese to weather vanes and windmills. While slamming into any of the aforementioned hazards won't cause you to buy the farm, they will often slow you down or bring you to an abrupt stop – and in a game where speed is of the essence this is something to avoid at all costs.

Crashing happens regularly though because Steve sneakily added a throttle which you'll inevitably use a lot in order to get near those low times. Using the throttle greatly increases the velocity of your biplane and unless you've got lightning reactions, you'll more likely come a cropper and add even more seconds to your overall time. The other thing to consider is that the actual entrance to each barn is quite small, meaning being a few pixels off will cause another crash and more loss of time.

You'll keep at it though because it's so much fun and once you've mastered the first three levels you'll discover a final, tougher level which features randomly placed hazards – good luck getting a low score here.

While there's no denying that *Barnstorming* is from a certain time, its core mechanics are timeless and I could easily imagine playing an updated version of it on a mobile phone or tablet. Like the best games it's exceptionally easy to understand, but a difficult one to master and after nearly 40 years of playing it, I'm still no closer to beating the manual's best score.

ULTIMATE GUIDE SUPER MONKEY

» [GameCube] They're small and cute and they dance too! How utterly charming.

» [GameCube] The famous 'guitar' level. Did you dare to attempt the 0.1 diameter wires in pursuit of extra bananas?

» [GameCube] The final Beginner floor presents the game's first real challenge, as you wobble along a narrow track to the goal.

AS SUPER MONKEY BALL CELEBRATES ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY, WE TURN THE CLOCK BACK TO 2001 WHEN AIAI AND HIS PALS SPUN ONTO THE GAMECUBE AND CAPTURED GAMERS' HEARTS WITH THEIR PUZZLING PLATFORMS AND PARTY GAMES. LET'S ROLL!

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

***Super Monkey Ball* was surely the biggest surprise in the GameCube's launch line-up when the console debuted in 2001.** Sega's game was not an unknown quantity, as positive word of mouth spread following its reveal at the Nintendo Space World show in Tokyo. There, where the public were able to sample GameCube software for the very first time, *NGC Magazine* reported that, "It was the game of the show for many people." This was some statement to make, particularly as Sega's game was competing for attention with two first-party launch games, *Luigi's Mansion* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, a sequel to the acclaimed N64 game.

Yet, there were still question marks about the name, the look, the whole concept of monkeys rolling around in transparent balls, collecting bananas and trying not to tumble into the abyss. Was it too quirky, too cutesy, too oddball? Admittedly, it wasn't an impenetrable Japanese RPG or a human-faced fish simulator, but would this crazy mix of simian mayhem work in the West? That was quickly answered when the import reviews for the game started to appear in the press. Both *NGC* and *Edge* scored *Super Monkey Ball* higher than *Luigi's Mansion* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, with the former awarding it 92% and calling it, "A great concept beautifully executed," and the latter summing up its 9/10 review with a single word "genius".

The Japanese launch line-up was significantly bolstered when the GameCube arrived in the West (where everyone briefly went gaga over *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*), but *Super Monkey Ball* remained the stand out title for many gamers. Referring to one of Sega's other

launch titles, *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle*, *Nintendo Official Magazine* opened by saying "*Super Monkey Ball* is as magical as any blue hedgehog", and concluded that "this deserves to be in every gamer's collection". *CUBE* magazine was also full of praise for Sega's game in its glowing 93% review, "Some of the best games ever have also been some of the simplest. This isn't hyperbole: *Super Monkey Ball* is the best GameCube title of them all."

We'd argue that *Super Monkey Ball*'s inherent simplicity was key to its huge appeal. The GameCube's controller was bristling with buttons yet players used just the analogue stick to control the game (this was made even easier thanks to the

"[TOSHIHIRO] NAGOSHI DECIDED TO PULL TOGETHER A TEAM OF FIVE PEOPLE AND DEVELOP A SIMPLE GAME WITH A BARE MINIMUM OF RESOURCES"

» [GameCube] Another early challenge sees you negotiating moving platforms. Do you go straight to the goal or grab all the fruit first?

» [GameCube] Due to the difficulty of some floors, the commentators cry of 'Fall out!' soon becomes ingrained in your brain.

MINIGAME MAYHEM

THE BEST MINIGAMES FROM ACROSS THE SERIES

MONKEY TARGET

SUPER MONKEY BALL

The obvious place to start, with not just the best minigame in the series, but one of the best ever devised. Players take turns to try and hit the target and score the most points. The format was tweaked in subsequent games, but the original version was already perfect.

MONKEY RACE

SUPER MONKEY BALL

This simple kart-style racing game provides a nice change of pace (literally) to the more tactical minigames. It features six courses, which can be raced individually or as part of a grand prix, and has a bunch of power-ups you can use to get an edge against your three rivals.

MONKEY GOLF

SUPER MONKEY BALL

Mini golf with monkeys! It couldn't fail really. This was the only minigame in the original that was overhauled for the sequel, becoming a regular game of golf, but for us it's more fun in its putt-putt form. There are 18 holes in total and some are pretty damn tricky.

MONKEY BOWLING

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

Another classic minigame which was updated for the sequel, but this one didn't mess with the winning formula, and instead added a separate Special Mode which introduced wacky lanes. The *Banana Blitz* version is also recommended as you can play with the Wiimote.

MONKEY TENNIS

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

A-ha! We never got to watch simian racket sports on the Beeb but we could play it (providing we spent 2,500 points to unlock it). It's fairly simple, as you would expect, but very entertaining playing against friends or COMs in singles or double matches.

MONKEY DOGFIGHT

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

Another of the new minigames introduced in the sequel. While aerial combat with monkeys might sound like it's clutching at straws, it works really well, playing a little like the multiplayer mode in *Star Fox 64*. There are three arenas and it supports up to four players.

MONKEY BOUNCE

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

Of the three new minigames introduced in *Adventure*, this is easily the most compelling as you use just the analogue stick to bounce around the board, flipping the squares to your own colour. Additional boards can be purchased in the main game by spending bananas.

MONKEY HOCKEY

SUPER MONKEY BALL TOUCH & ROLL

The DS version features a mix of old and new minigames, and the gem is this spin on air hockey which works really well with the stylus. Of real interest is the Line Smasher mode where your bats are chipped away every time you hit the disc. It's absolutely perfect for link-up play.

» [GameCube] The bonus floors let you stock up on supplies, safe in the knowledge that you can't die (for once).

» [GameCube] Risk versus reward. Is it worth potentially losing a life to grab a bunch of bananas?

» [GameCube] In the multiplayer Competition Mode you race your rivals to the goal.

» [GameCube] The wonderful Monkey Target was a firm favourite with fans, who naturally objected to the changes made to it in the follow-ups.

octagonal gate found at the stick's base). The general idea, which owed an obvious debt to Atari's fantastic arcade hit *Marble Madness*, was to steer one of four encapsulated monkeys through perilous 3D levels, to reach the goal before the time ran out. Rather than control your sphere directly, like *Marble Madness*, you moved it by tilting the floor itself. It was so beautifully simple that anyone, regardless of age or ability, could pick it up and play.

This simplicity was by design. The game was produced and directed by Toshihiro Nagoshi, who joined Sega in 1989 and earned key credits on *Virtua Racing*, *Daytona USA* and *Shenmue* before moving on to create the acclaimed *Yakuza* series. Around 2000, when Nagoshi was heading up the Amusement Vision (AV) development team at Sega, he was asked by his bosses why creating games had become so expensive. He initially shrugged it off, but then decided to pull together a team of five people and develop a simple game with a bare minimum of resources, to show the suits that it was still possible. Three months later he'd produced *Monkey Ball*, a fun arcade game that ran on Sega's Naomi arcade hardware. The original coin-op is largely overlooked these days, but the core game was fully templated in the arcades. So when Sega joined forces with Nintendo to support the GameCube, *Monkey Ball* was an obvious candidate for a conversion to the console, and it was simple enough to have it ready at launch (complete with enough enhancements to make it *Super*).

The game's arcade origins are the reason why there's no back story to answer those unnecessary questions like why are those poor monkeys trapped in balls and what the hell the overall objective is. And because you didn't want credits lasting too long in the arcades, it's also why the game featured such a steep difficulty curve. It started easy enough on the ten-floor Beginner level, but as you progressed through the thirty-floor Advanced and fifty-floor Expert levels, you quickly realised that this was no roll in the park. The wide-open floors soon gave way to twisted, labyrinthine mazes where reaching the goal became a torturous obsession.

> **"THE WIDE OPEN FLOORS SOON GAVE WAY TO TWISTED, LABYRINTHINE MAZES WHERE REACHING THE GOAL BECAME A TORTUROUS OBSESSION"**

Amusement Vision deserves praise for not reducing the difficulty in the GameCube version. In fact, on the coin-op, there was a single Master floor for those who somehow managed to complete Expert (and the bonus Expert Extra floors) without using a continue, whereas on the GameCube an additional nine Master floors were added. This brought the total number of floors to 118 and the result was a hardcore challenge; a true gamer's game.

PLAIN OL' MONKEY BALL

A LOOK AT THE GAME'S ARCADE ORIGINS

If you wondered why the original GameCube game carried the *Super* moniker, it's because it wasn't the first title in the series. Debuting in Japanese arcades in May 2001, *Monkey Ball* is perhaps best described as the 'final beta' for the GameCube version, which was released four months later. The main game is almost identical, with the same floors in the same order – it just looks a bit prettier on the GameCube. The chief difference is that *Monkey Ball* was designed for single players, which means no Competition Mode and crucially no minigames. This is why the coin-op only features three playable monkeys – AiAi, MeeMee and Baby – as GonGon was added later to support four-player multiplayer on the GameCube. The one feature the console absolutely couldn't compete with was the original's controller – a curious banana-shaped joystick that you gripped to play. To say it stood out in the arcades would be an understatement.

Monkey Ball ran on Sega's Naomi GD-ROM system, which obviously made it a prime candidate for a Dreamcast conversion. In fact, it was reported in early 2001 that Amusement Vision was busy doing just that, and you can imagine that it would have been perfectly at home on the console. But following Sega's decision to quit the console race, development was shifted over to GameCube where the enhanced version delivered results for both Sega and Nintendo – something that seemed unthinkable just 12 months earlier.

» Comparing the arcade (above)and GameCube (below) versions. All floors feature the same Sega blue sky background.

» [GameCube] Shades of *Sonic* here as you negotiate one of the later floors.

» [GameCube] The game features an interactive credits sequence, where you try and grab bananas while avoiding the falling letters of the team members' names.

MINIATURE MONKEYS

A LOOK AT THE HANDHELD VERSIONS OF SUPER MONKEY BALL

SUPER MONKEY BALL JR

FORMAT	GBA
YEAR	2002

The troop's first handheld outing is a limited version of the first game, featuring seventy-four floors and four minigames. Controlling the game using the d-pad is fine, and the graphics are very good for a system that traditionally struggles with 3D. A pared down Nokia N-Gage version followed.

SUPER MONKEY BALL: TOUCH & ROLL

FORMAT:	DS
YEAR:	2006

This more substantial handheld release features 120 floors (spread across twelve different worlds) and six minigames (three old, three new). It supports stylus control, which works well but ramps up the difficulty, meaning most will cop-out and simply play with the d-pad instead.

SUPER MONKEY BALL 3D

FORMAT	3DS
YEAR	2011

This 3DS launch title was evidently rushed, with a total of eighty floors and just two minigames (both poor). The controls are the real issue however: you can use either the circle pad or the tilt sensor to control your ball, and it's too easy with the former and too hard with the latter.

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA SPLITZ

FORMAT:	VITA
YEAR:	2012

Like the 3DS game, the Vita version lets you use tilt controls if you wish, but thankfully the game wasn't designed with them in mind, so it's still challenging using the analogue stick. It looks amazing and content-wise features one hundred floors and eight minigames.

"THE FOUR-PLAYER PARTY GAMES WERE GREAT FOR GATHERINGS, WITH MONKEY TARGET SESSIONS OFTEN EXTENDING INTO THE SMALL HOURS"

Of course there was more to *Super Monkey Ball* than just the main game and it's the reason why your Aunty Joan and Uncle Alan also played. To widen its appeal to as many gamers as possible, AV added multiplayer support that was focused around six entertaining minigames. Three of these (Monkey Race, Monkey Fight and Monkey Target) were available to play immediately, while the others (Monkey Billiards, Monkey Bowling and Monkey Golf) could be unlocked once you'd earned enough points in the main game. These four-player party games were great for gatherings, with Monkey Target sessions often extending into the small hours. [We played it all the time on *games™* – Ed] They also provided perfect respite from the main game's tougher challenges. They were critical darlings too. NGC wrote, "*Super Monkey Ball* takes the crown of Best Party Game from *Mario Party*, and is a contender for Best Multiplayer Game too." More than one publication claimed that the game offered the best multiplayer thrills on a console since *GoldenEye*, which was high praise indeed when you consider the many accolades that Rare's game had picked up.

The formula was set and a franchise was born, with each subsequent game pairing up a challenging single-player roll-a-thon with an equally joyful multiplayer experience. *Super Monkey Ball 2* arrived 12 months after the original and in many ways was the perfect sequel. The main game now featured 140 floors and each difficulty level (including Master) included ten Extra stages. In addition there was a new Story Mode which, aside from a pointless plot involving the evil Dr Bad-Boon (who's trying to pilfer bananas or some such), introduced a new progression structure where floors were organised into groups of ten which could be attempted in any order and with unlimited retries. This meant that if you hit a brick wall you could still proceed and return to it later. This also meant that some vocal fans of the original complained that Sega had bowed to pressure and made the game easier. In some ways this was true, but the difficulty curve went perpendicular when you reached the Master floors so there was still a ridiculous amount of challenge for pro Monkey Ballers.

The included minigames also attracted a little controversy. There were now twelve minigames – six new, and six from the original. Those that returned were tweaked and the new changes weren't welcomed by everyone. Alarmingly, fan favourite Monkey Target was meddled with, and the introduction of formation flying and power-ups diluted the original's instant appeal.

IT'S A BIT TRICKY!

THE SUPER MONKEY BALL FLOORS THAT WILL MAKE YOU BAWL

EXAM-C

FLOOR: EXPERT 7

The third 'test' floor is one of gaming's most famous difficulty spikes. Arriving early in Expert, you're faced with a sprawling floor that features a nasty ramp and a snaking finish. Compounding all of this is the 60-second time limit. Beat this and you can beat anything.

SPEEDY JAM

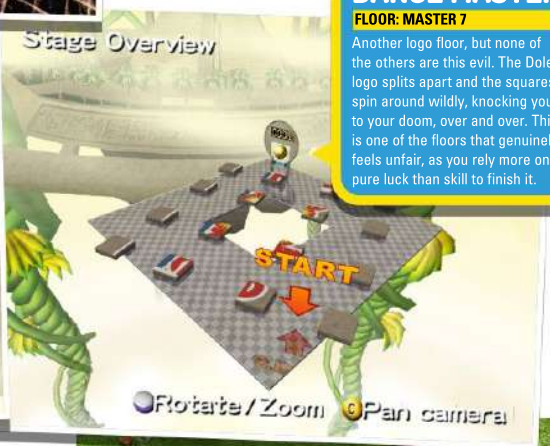
FLOOR: EXPERT 36

An update of the earlier Middle Jam, but as the name suggests, the moving bumpers are now faster. Much faster. This makes the intersection, where you have to quickly swap to the opposite beam using precise 90-degree turns, one of the trickiest pinch points in the game.

DANCE MASTER

FLOOR: MASTER 7

Another logo floor, but none of the others are this evil. The Dole logo splits apart and the squares spin around wildly, knocking you to your doom, over and over. This is one of the floors that genuinely feels unfair, as you rely more on pure luck than skill to finish it.



STAMINA MASTER

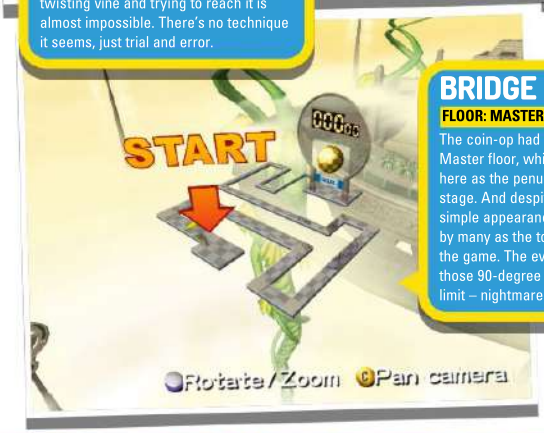
FLOOR: MASTER 3

If you thought Expert level was as tough as it could get, welcome to Master and this little beauty. The opening section is OK, but the goal lies at the foot of that twisting vine and trying to reach it is almost impossible. There's no technique it seems, just trial and error.

BRIDGE MASTER

FLOOR: MASTER 9

The coin-op had just a single Master floor, which appeared here as the penultimate Master stage. And despite its fairly simple appearance, it's regarded by many as the toughest floor in the game. The ever-thinning path, those 90-degree turns, that time limit – nightmare.



THE MINI MAKING OF: SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

CREATIVE DIRECTOR PAUL GARDNER REVEALS THE STORY BEHIND THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE SERIES

How did Traveller's Tales become involved in the series?
Sega had a long-standing relationship with Traveller's Tales going back to the *Sonic* games. I was part of the team at Traveller's Tales Oxford and we'd not long finished development on *Crash Twinsanity*. Sega's producers were apparently looking for a game with a similar style and sense of humour, so *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* was assigned to us.

Where did the idea to produce a story-driven adventure come from?
That was part of Sega's brief. We were given a story bible that had been created by Amusement Vision for the original two games and there were lots of interesting ideas in there to draw from. We talked to Toshihiro Nagoshi a couple of times during production, first about the project as a whole, then later for feedback on the gameplay. We developed the story outline in co-operation with Sega, who didn't want there to be enemies in a traditional sense as it was looking for scenarios where problems were solved through co-operation. Sega gave us a list of real-world issues to use as inspiration for the problems the monkeys would encounter. It was pretty tough. How do you solve socio-economic and political problems by rolling around picking up bananas?

Quite. What did you do?
We realised that a lot of the problems on the list were driven by fear – of the unknown, of change, of losing power, or whatever. So that little abstraction gave us a good framework for designing the goals and our enemies became a manifestation of those fears.

Did any games influence the design?
Super Monkey Ball 2 was the biggest influence for us, in terms of tone, design, story and characterisation. *Jak & Daxter* was something we studied in a lot of detail, and Rare's games were definitely a big influence on the studio, especially *Conker's Bad Fur Day* which was an amazing showcase for what was possible in the integration of gameplay, story and humour.

> **"NAGOSHI TOLD US THAT HE REALLY LIKED OUR VERSIONS OF THE CLASSIC MINIGAMES"**
> **PAUL GARDNER**

Were there any notable challenges during the development?
The tone of the game was hard to get right. Sega wanted a similar sense of humour to *Crash Twinsanity*, but that was dependent on the performance and delivery of the voice actors, whereas the dialogue in *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* was all text-based. So, the rhythm of the story and style of humour ended up being very different.

On reflection, how pleased were you with the finished product?
I would say it's close to being a great game, which might sound like faint praise, but there is so much to like about it. Looking back now I'm happy about how well the adventure elements hold up. I feel like the team put a lot of care into the puzzle stages and the minigames, too. Nagoshi told us that he really liked our versions of the classic minigames. I think conceptually there's perhaps some tension between the adventure format and the traditional puzzle stage gameplay. Although the first few games are very cute stylistically and the sequel has a story mode, beneath that they're both pretty hardcore action puzzle games. For those players who love that kind of challenge the story isn't so important, when conversely that's what *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*'s main focus is. So we were maybe at risk of alienating the existing audience, while the mechanics were perhaps too tough for newcomers to get to grips with. Are those two things reconcilable? I'm not sure, but we gave it our best shot.

SIMIAN SEQUELS

WHERE THE MONKEYS ROLLED TO NEXT

SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

FORMAT: GAMECUBE ■ YEAR: 2002

■ Arriving in short order, the sequel provides more of everything that made the original a hit. This means more floors with new features (including switches and seesaws), double the number of minigames and even a story mode. For many fans this is the definitive entry.

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

FORMAT: PS2/XBOX ■ YEAR: 2005

■ A mid-priced 'greatest hits' package for non-Nintendo consoles, including everything from the first two games plus loads of exclusive floors. Playing this on PS2 and Xbox makes you realise that the GameCube's analogue stick is still the best way to play original games.

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

FORMAT: VARIOUS ■ YEAR: 2006

■ The game that no-one asked for is not the dud some would have you believe. Even if you skip the adventure portion completely, there's still enough content with the new floors and minigames to make it worth your while. The PSP version includes exclusive features.

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ

FORMAT: WII ■ YEAR: 2006

■ Two new monkeys, Doctor and YanYan, make their debut in this uneven update that's frontloaded with 50 minigames (Monkey Darts anyone?) Whether you dig the Wiimote controls is down to personal preference, but most would agree that the bosses are duff.

» [GameCube] Multi-camera replays capture the moment you successfully finish a floor.

Reports claimed that a second sequel was coming to the GameCube in early 2004. Subtitled *Banana Crazy, Super Monkey Ball 3* was expected to include eight-player support over LAN, but Nagoshi has since claimed it was just a rumour – despite the name and logo being trademarked by Sega. A third game for the series did arrive in 2005, but this was an amalgamation of the two GameCube games for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox. *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* included all of the floors from both games, plus dozens of new ones to bring the total number of floors to a twitch-inducing 300. The 12 minigames from *Super Monkey Ball 2* returned, and for the purists there was an option to play the original *Super Monkey Ball* versions where available (and Monkey Target fans did rejoice). Interestingly the PS2 version runs at half the framerate of the GameCube games, while the PS2 and Xbox pads both lack the octagonal gate of the GameCube's pad which make both versions slightly trickier to play as a result.

Another entry would grace the GameCube in 2006, although it perhaps wasn't the game fans were expecting. *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* ditched the traditional main game in favour of a story-driven platformer where the foursome rolled around 3D worlds, interacting with the local monkeys and performing tasks. Of course there were still standalone floors to solve and minigames to play, so it didn't feel completely alien. The game, which was also released for the PS2 and PSP, was not created by AV. Instead, UK-based Traveller's Tales handled development duties while AV worked on the next entry, *Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz.* Keeping the tradition established with the first game, *Banana Blitz* launched alongside the Nintendo Wii in 2006. In many ways this was a back-to-basics affair with 100 new floors to tackle, but it did add two controversial new features: there were boss battles (yawn) and the monkeys could now jump (yikes). Furthermore, the game was now controlled using the Wiimote, which worked rather well once you'd acclimatised to it. Where the game really ran riot was with its minigames, as there were now 50 of the things! Sadly you could count the really good ones on a monkey's paw. The next Wii game – the 2010 release *Step & Roll* – dispensed with the boss battles and the jumping mechanic, which boded well. However, as the title indicates, it was primarily designed to be controlled using the Wii Balance Board and this proved to be a gimmick too far.

Fast forward to 2019 and a HD remake of *Banana Blitz* was released for current systems. While it was mostly well-received, some chins were scratched over why Sega chose *that* particular entry and not the classic GameCube games. Happily, the success of *Banana Blitz* has paved the way for the new release *Banana Mania,* which is a remake of *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* (itself a compilation of the first two titles). Over the years the follow-ups have struggled to replicate the perfect simplicity of the original, so it's fitting that Sega should return to the series' origins to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

"SUPER MONKEY BALL 3 WAS EXPECTED TO INCLUDE EIGHT-PLAYER SUPPORT, BUT NAGOSHI HAS SINCE CLAIMED IT WAS JUST A RUMOUR"

» [GameCube] *Super Monkey Ball 2* introduced a story of sorts which was rather Ei-Ei-Poo.

» [GameCube] One of the trickiest floors in the sequel involves a rotating GameCube. The goal is inside the disc compartment!

» [PS2] *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* was essentially the first two games with extras.

SUPER MONKEY BALL: STEP & ROLL

FORMAT: WII ■ YEAR: 2010

■ We wonder how many people bought this because their Wii Balance Board was gathering dust. Safe to say it's the least accurate control method ever devised, but at least you can ditch it for the Wiimote – at which point it becomes a clone of *Banana Blitz.* Skip it.

SUPER MONKEY BALL BANANA MANIA™

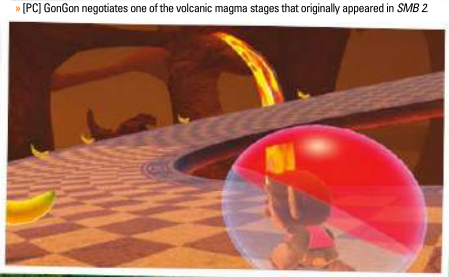
HOW DO YOU UPDATE A CLASSIC LIKE SUPER MONKEY BALL? ONE MAN WHO KNOWS IS MASAO SHIROSAKI, PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR OF BANANA MANIA. HERE HE TELLS US HOW HE APPROACHED THE NEW REMAKE

» [PC] All 12 on the minigames from *SMB 2* return, including the enjoyable Monkey Soccer.

» [PC] The visuals have been given a gorgeous new makeover, making the already colourful originals look even more vivid.

» [PC] Bananas are once again on the menu, but now there are also Dark Bananas which you need to avoid.

» [PC] GonGon negotiates one of the volcanic magma stages that originally appeared in *SMB 2*



» MeeMee pictured with Masao Shirosaki, the game's producer and director.

***Super Monkey Ball* is back.** The revival began in 2019 with the release of *Banana Blitz HD*, an update of the Nintendo Wii game. And in October 2021 it will be followed by *Banana Mania*, a modern remake of *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe*, the 2005 compilation that brought together the two classic GameCube games. It's a great time to be a Monkey Baller. But if truth be told, the series has never really gone away. In the 20 years since the first game debuted, there have only been seven years when there hasn't been some kind of release, be it on console, handheld or mobile.

The series is currently overseen by Masao Shirosaki, a designer at Sega's Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio who has previously worked with *Super Monkey Ball* creator Toshihiro Nagoshi on the *Yakuza* series. Shirosaki reveals that Sega had been looking at the series for several years. "There was actually a plan to remake *Super Monkey Ball* even before the production of *Banana Blitz HD*," he says. "However, our staff couldn't find the time for it and the project didn't go anywhere. Then after I had finished working on the [*Yakuza* spin-off] *Judgment* and was thinking about what project to work on next, I heard there was an idea to revisit *Super Monkey Ball*. That's when I decided to create *Banana Blitz HD*. I remember talking a lot with Nagoshi about the series back then."

Those conversations no doubt touched on the level of challenge in the original games, and whether it should be simplified for the remakes. Addressing our concerns, Shirosaki says, "The gameplay is very well established so for *Banana Mania* I focused on improving the visuals to fit the current trend, while also enhancing the usability." Usability? "I've included various support features in the main game. I worked on this title thinking that instead of simply changing the stages to adjust the difficulty, I want to give players the experience of gradually getting better at the game, even if that means using the support features." Thankfully it seems that these support features designed to help the player are optional.

New modes and options have also been added to ensure that even long-time fans will experience something new. "It can be boring just to play the main game so we've prepared a lot of missions," Shirosaki continues. "There's also a customisation feature that lets you change your character's outfit to your liking, and we've added a new photo mode. We've also added modes that let you play in a different way. For instance, in *Super Monkey Ball* you normally collect the bananas on a stage, but there is now a Dark Banana mode where you now have to do the opposite and try not to get those

bananas. The 12 party games have also been upgraded so please look forward to that as well. Finally, characters like Jet and Jam that appeared in previous entries are back along with AiAi and his friends."

> **"I WANT TO CREATE A NEW SUPER MONKEY BALL GAME... I HAVE IDEAS ON WHAT IT COULD BE LIKE"**
> **MASAO SHIROSAKI**

One benefit of working on remakes like this is that you don't have to create everything from scratch. "We were able to use the stage data from the original games. However, the oldest stages are 20 years old so we were not able to use the visuals as they were. The visuals have been remade to be very colourful and maintain the style from *Banana Blitz HD*. It was fun to see the stages become more colourful. I also brainstormed ideas with the designers in charge of the stages. I'm sure those who know the original games will have fun looking at what has changed."

Shirosaki is mindful about making too many changes to the original stage designs, as he appreciates that they're key to the enduring appeal of the series. "The level design makes you love *Super Monkey Ball* more and more as you keep playing. Even though this game has very simple rules, when you actually try to play it, it's not so easy. Nowadays you can watch videos on sites like YouTube and I'm surprised to see the different ways to beat the stages. I think the number one reason for the appeal is that the level design allows for that kind of experimentation. I've actually asked Nagoshi about anecdotes on the stages and he said that they were designed by staff who had majored in architecture. This kind of deep knowledge and skill was used in the level designs and I believe that's why it is loved by so many people over such a long period of time."

So with *Banana Mania* arriving to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first game's release, where will the series go next? "As this game and the previous one are remakes, I do feel that I want to create a new *Super Monkey Ball* game," reveals Shirosaki. "I have ideas on what it could be like. I'm looking forward to seeing how *Super Monkey Ball* will grow." He won't be drawn on the details, but we wonder whether we might finally get to play *Banana Crazy*, the fabled third game in the series that was originally slated to appear on the GameCube in 2004?

One thing is certain: nothing will happen any time soon if *Banana Mania* doesn't do the business for Sega. "This is not something I can do on my own, so I would like everyone to first enjoy *Banana Mania* and if there are enough voices looking forward to the next title, it may come true. I have been looking at everyone's reactions on social media and no matter what language it's in, I always translate it and read through them. I would be overjoyed if we could create the future of a new *Super Monkey Ball* together."

» [PC] Every one of the key characters appear, including YanYan who made her debut in *Banana Blitz*.

Super Monkey Ball: Banana Mania is available in October for consoles and PC.

MORE THAN MONKEYS

WHICH CHARACTERS ARE GUEST STARRING IN THE NEW GAME?

You may remember that Sonic The Hedgehog joined the monkeys in *Banana Blitz HD* (which memorably changed the bananas to gold rings when you played as him). Well the spiky blue one returns in *Banana Mania*, only this time he's joined by sidekick Tails and a bunch of new characters. "There are a lot of appealing characters at Sega, so I wanted as many to appear as possible," says Shirosaki. "We had Sonic join the previous title and he was extremely popular, so we decided to have Tails join in this time. We also have Beat from *Jet Set Radio*, which still has a large fanbase. And as the creator of this series, Toshihiro Nagoshi, is the same as the *Yakuza* series, we decided to have Kazuma Kiryu join in as well. This time we were also able to collaborate with characters from other companies in the form of DLC, so you'll be able to play as Morgana from *Persona 5*, Suezo from *Monster Rancher*, and everyone's idol Hello Kitty. Seeing all these characters moving around in the *Monkey Ball* world shows how much potential it has and how welcoming it is."

For the Sega devotees among you, the *Deluxe Edition* lets you play as a Game Gear, Saturn or Dreamcast. "Personally I was so happy to see the Sega consoles in there. It just leaves a big impression to see them in a ball, and it's funny. You can also get emotional remembering the days when you played on those consoles [laughs]."

» [PC] Some characters are free to play (Sonic and Tails are unlockable, for instance), while others will be available as paid DLC.

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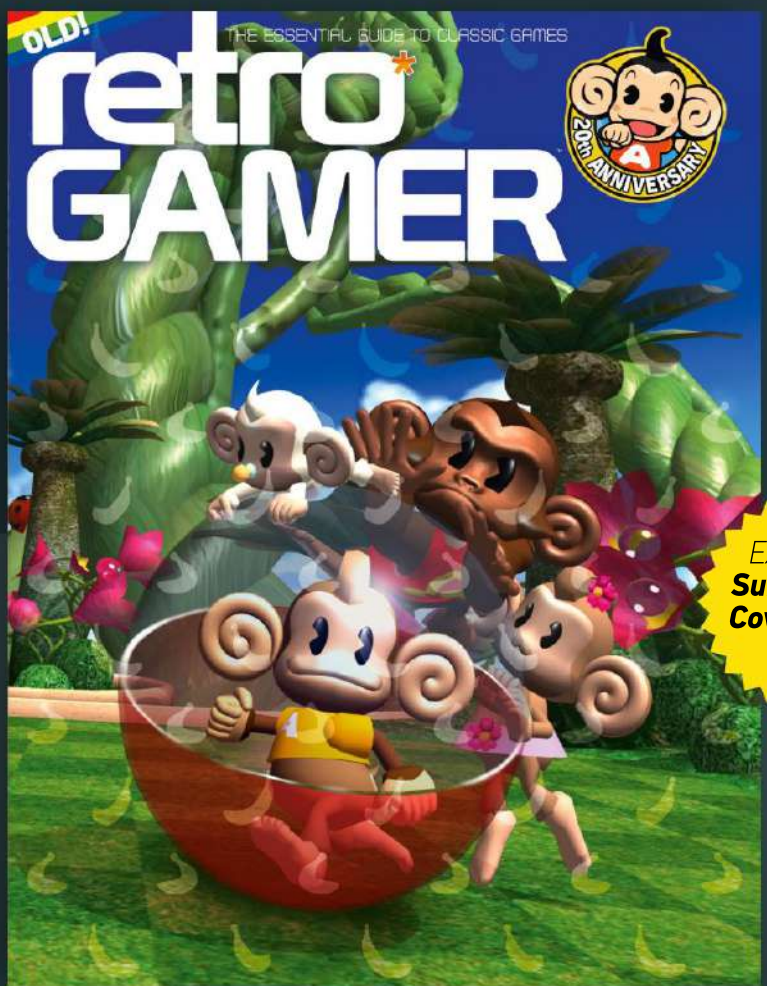

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RGT

Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games

» [SNES] This scene shows the guards beating a prisoner in the dungeons, and is only included in Japan.

JPN

PRINCE OF PERSIA

JPN → JPN
Japan → Rest of World

FORMAT
SNES ■

DEVELOPER
Arsys Software ■

YEAR
1992 ■

ORIGIN
Japan ■

LOCALISED FOR
Japan ■

REASONS
Violence, Religion ■

ECONOMY

■ **There have been plenty of versions of Jordan Mechner's classic platform adventure game over the years, but the SNES version of *Prince Of Persia* is rather different to the rest.** The game was published in Japan by Masaya and aimed at that market first and foremost, and features quite a few enhancements over the standard version that most other conversions were based on. There are redesigned stages as well as brand-new ones to bring the total number up to 20, significant graphical enhancements, and even extra bits of storytelling. Unfortunately, a few of these new additions would run afoul of Nintendo's strict policies from that time, and had to be removed from the US and European versions of the game published by Konami.

The first major change is the removal of a scene from the introductory sequence, in which guards beat a prisoner before dragging him away to a cell. This isn't a particularly graphic scene and doesn't feel tremendously out of place next to other SNES games of the time, but the defenceless nature of the victim might have run up against the policy forbidding "random, gratuitous and/or excessive violence". In the non-Japanese versions of the game, the scene is removed entirely and the associated text referring to the princess being locked away is moved to the next scene.

The second major change is to do with potentially offensive imagery. The door at the beginning of stage 19 bears the image of a pentagram, as does the throne room later in the stage. There's also a giant pentagram on the floor during the game's final fight. At the time, Nintendo forbade the use of "symbols that are related to any racial, religious, nationalistic or ethnic group", with pentagrams specifically named as unsuitable for inclusion. The door and throne room symbols were both redrawn into less controversial symbols, while the final fight's pentagram was simply removed and replaced with plain ground.

ROW

» [SNES] International versions of the game skip from this scene straight to Jafar walking down the hall.

PRINCE OF PERSIA
Departing: 1992

JPN

» [SNES] A nice big pentagram on the floor was a perfectly acceptable sight for Japanese players.

ROW

» [SNES] In the Nineties, Nintendo was worried about anything that might make videogames look like devil worship.

GEGEGE NO KITAROU: YOUKAI DAIMAKYOU

USA → JPN
Japan → USA

GEGEGE NO KITAROU: YOUKAI DAIMAKYOU
Departing: 1986

FORMAT
NES

DEVELOPER
TOSE

YEAR
1986

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
USA

REASONS
Commercial

ECONOMY

You'll be forgiven for never having heard of *GeGeGe No Kitarou*, since it is very Japanese and has had limited Western exposure, but if you had grown up in Japan you would definitely have heard of it. The series first gained popularity as a manga in the Sixties and follows Kitarou, the last survivor of the Ghost Tribe, as he strives to bring peace between humans and yokai. His tales have been told across multiple animated TV series, live action films and over a dozen video games, and this Famicom game published by Bandai was the very first of them.

In America, the NES game wasn't based on a beloved multimedia franchise, and instead became the rather generic *Ninja Kid*, most likely because Bandai knew that the character and setting had no significance to the American audience and therefore didn't fancy paying a licensing fee for them. The game's title screen music was rewritten to better fit the new theme of the game, and our new protagonist got to use shurikens and boomerangs rather than flying fingers and geta sandals. It's certainly a reasonable change to make, and it was executed well enough.

» [Famicom] Here's Kitarou, attempting to finger blast some ghosts straight out of the human world.

» [NES] And here's Kyo from *Ninja Kid*, doing the same with shurikens. Do blades work on ghosts?

FIRE PRO WRESTLING A

JPN → FRANCE
Japan → Rest of World

FIRE PRO WRESTLING A
Departing: 2001

FORMAT
Game Boy Advance

DEVELOPER
Spike

YEAR
2001

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest of World

REASONS
Commercial

ECONOMY

What do you do when you can't license the real names of athletes? In the grand tradition of *Sensible Soccer*, fudge it so that they're easily recognisable but legally distinct. That's why *Fire Pro Wrestling A* featured WFW wrestlers such as Triple J and The Underground, and WWC wrestlers like Will Coldback and Axe Duggan – all of whom have absolutely *nothing* to do with Triple H, The Undertaker, Bill Goldberg or Hulk Hogan, despite any clear visual similarities.

For the eventual Western release as *Fire Pro Wrestling*, a lot of these were deemed too close to be legally safe. The WFW and WWC promotions became APW and AWG respectively, and many of the wrestlers' names were changed, so Triple J became Double Trouble and The Underground became Death Head. But even those who escaped name changes, such as Axe Duggan and The Spike (no relation to Sting, you understand) received major palette changes to make sure that Spike and Bam Entertainment didn't have an unwelcome encounter with some lawyers. Recognisable, possibly trademarked move names such as the Jackhammer and Pedigree were also altered, leaving us with the Tomahawk and the W Arm Facebuster.

» [GBA] Ah yes, Axe Duggan – nothing to do with that Hulk Hogan lad and his Axe Bomber finish.

» [GBA] The famous red and yellow are gone in the Western version, and he probably enters to Real Canadian or something too.

THE EVOLUTION OF NODES OF YESOD

Odin's launch title Nodes Of Yesod put the firm on the map, and it influenced its subsequent arcade adventures Robin Of The Wood, Arc Of Yesod and Heartland. Odin co-designer Stuart Fotheringham looks back at the series' evolution

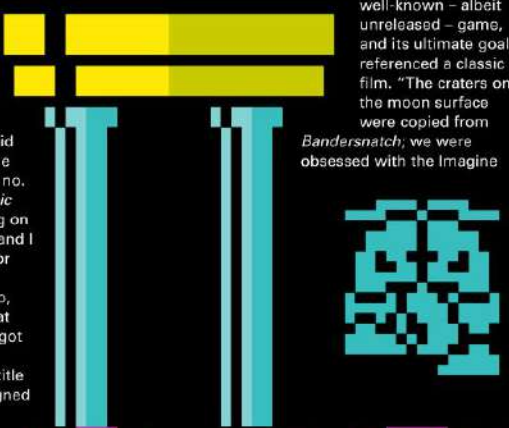
WORDS BY RORY MILNE

The videogames industry in Liverpool was a lot like musical chairs during the mid-Eighties. The collapse of Imagine Software left its former developers scrabbling for jobs, while the success of *Jet Set Willy* resulted in Software Projects hiring additional staff. Artist/designer Stuart Fotheringham was taken on by the firm to work with Matthew Smith on a *Jet Set Willy* sequel, and the company subsequently showed interest in a pitch made by Stuart's friend Colin Grunes. But as Stuart points out, the pair soon found themselves reconsidering their options.

"Colin had animated Noddy, because he wanted to get him into a game, and Software Projects very much liked his design," Stuart remembers. "So it got in touch with the Enid Blyton estate to license the rights, but the estate said no. In the meantime, the *Manic Miner* game I was working on came to an end, so Colin and I talked to the owner of Thor Software, Paul McKenna. Colin had his Noddy demo, and I had my experience at Software Projects, so we got work there."

With a licensed *Noddy* title off the table, Colin redesigned his animation to depict a well to do spaceman, whose atypical jump took inspiration from a popular platformer. "The idea was that 'Astro' Charlie Fotheringham Grunes was an upper class toff," Stuart says of the unlikely hero. "We had Charlie somersaulting because we loved *Impossible Mission*, and that had somersaulting in it. It also had speech, and that inspired us to add speech to our game. Mark Butler ended up doing it, that's why, 'Welcome to Nodes Of Yesod,' was said in a Scouse accent!"

Like its welcome message, a key mechanic in *Nodes Of Yesod* took its lead from a well-known – albeit unreleased – game, and its ultimate goal referenced a classic film. "The craters on the moon surface were copied from *Bandersnatch*; we were obsessed with the Imagine Megagames," Stuart admits, "and obviously we got the idea of including a monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. There was a little animation at the end, which not many people saw, where the monolith spun around and around, and blinked away into nothing."



Inspired by their game's cratered moon, Stuart, Colin and the developers who had joined them on *Nodes* decided its hero should have to look for and catch a sidekick. "The moles started off with us thinking about the craters," Stuart recalls, "and how the moles could play peek-a-boo – otherwise people might not see them. The reason we had *moon-munching* moles was that we wanted to have a changeable map. So you started off with one map, and then the moles could eat through the

» [ZX Spectrum] *Nodes Of Yesod* and later games in the series were programmed by the talented Steve Wetherill.

walls, and that would give you a different map."

Having mapped out *Nodes Of Yesod*, the design team working on the game devised both destructible and invulnerable foes for Astro Charlie and his fluffy wingman. "When we made the maps there weren't any baddies," Stuart notes. "We later created these goat-beast things, and decided where they would go, and we decided what was going to spawn in which rooms. Then once we had that we had the idea of the mole flying out of the backpack, and then we realised that players could use the mole to smash the baddies."

> "The moles started off with us thinking about the craters, and how the moles could play peek-a-boo – otherwise people might not see them"
>
> STUART FOTHERINGHAM

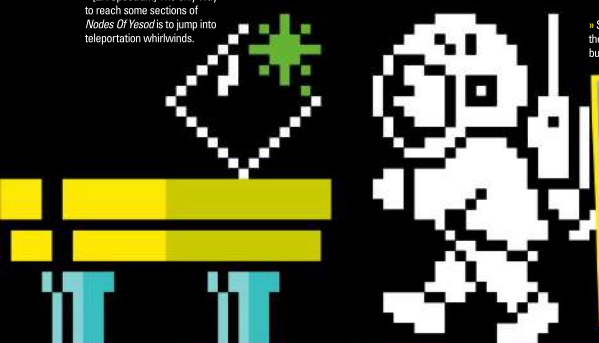
As well as enemies in fixed locations, the *Nodes* developers also incorporated a roaming opponent, a gravity inducing defence mechanism and collectables called Alchiems. "He was a Cosmonaut, because of the cold war," Stuart recollects. "But we didn't have much time for his animation, so he just flew diagonally through the map to wherever Charlie was and tried to steal his Alchiems. Once he'd got one he would fly off, but then he'd come back later to steal more. The gravity sticks were there to counter the Cosmonauts, and to make *Nodes* easier, because the other mechanics we were putting in were making it really hard."

The most challenging mechanics in *Nodes* revolved around its core objective of taking eight Alchiems to a monolith, a task Stuart now feels was overly difficult. "The whole thing with the Alchiems was too complex," Stuart sighs. "We had four different shapes and four possible end locations, and you had to work out which location to go to. Then the floor above that location had a master Alchiem of a specific shape to tell you which shape of Alchiem to collect, and then when you finally came back with those you had to fall through the floor in order to meet the monolith."

Given how taxing *Nodes* was, it seemed only fair to help players out, and so teleportation whirlwinds were added that beamed Charlie between parts of the game. "Most of the baddies were a single colour, but with the whirlwinds we flashed them lots of different colours to make them look weird!" Stuart beams. "There was one that would teleport you into a goat-beast, and you would bounce off him, so you had to make sure that when you went into that whirlwind you had enough energy to survive."

Announced with stylish magazine adverts, *Nodes Of Yesod* reviewed and sold very well, although the follow-up to the sci-fi arcade adventure had a very different theme. "The key inspiration was the TV show *Robin Of Sherwood*, and the enemies were taken from the legend of Robin Hood," Stuart enthuses. "The Norman soldiers were common, and running around everywhere. Whereas the wild boars were only found in a few long, straight sections that you had to sneak around while they were running about." As well as setting the sequel in medieval times, Stuart and ▶

» [ZX Spectrum] The only way to reach some sections of *Nodes Of Yesod* is to jump into teleportation whirlwinds.



» Stuart Fotheringham left the games industry long ago, but he's still a keen gamer.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: EPIC EXPLORATION

NAVIGATING MOON CAVERNS, SHERWOOD FOREST AND AN ALIEN WORLD

NODES OF YESOD

The lunar caves in *Nodes Of Yesod* are a maze of vertical shafts linked by horizontal tunnels, where you somersault from platform to platform to make progress. You can also direct a mole to munch through the weak spots in the walls, and then use those to access blocked-off caverns.

ROBIN OF THE WOOD

There aren't any platforms in *Robin Of The Wood*, but like the *Nodes* games there's a labyrinth to navigate. Unfortunately it's located in Sherwood Forest, which by design is a mess of indistinct greenery, but there are markers that point you in the direction of notable landmarks.

ARC OF YESOD

Arc Of Yesod's platforming is similar to that in *Nodes*, although it's set beneath the soil of an alien planet rather than under the moon's surface. The sequel's exploration also differs, in that there's a network of teleporters that beam you great distances across the game's world.

» [ZX Spectrum] The extra lives in *Nodes Of Yesod* come with 'gravity sticks,' which drag your enemies downwards.

» [ZX Spectrum] Unlike the *Yesod* games, *Robin Of The Wood* has markers pointing towards important locations.

» [ZX Spectrum] The foes in *Robin Of The Wood* are easily dispatched, except for the wild boar!

» [ZX Spectrum] *Robin Of The Wood's* witch transports you to various locations in exchange for flowers.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

COOL COLLECTING

FROM GATHERING LUNAR KEYS AND GOLD TO FINDING MAGIC PAGES

NODES OF YESOD

The collecting in *Nodes Of Yesod* starts right away with you trying to catch a mole. You then have to find jewel-like Alchiems of the same shape as a Master Alchiem, which you identify by the fact that it's all one colour. Lastly, there are extra lives to bag throughout the game.

ROBIN OF THE WOOD

There's a lot to collect in *Robin Of The Wood,* with the gold you steal being the most important, as you trade that with ents for better weapons. There are also flowers to give to hermits and witches in exchange for health and teleportation, plus bonus life wreaths and spare arrows.

HEARTLAND

As it's based on magic, it's no surprise that you have to collect spells in *Heartland*. Small stars give you temporary immunity from damage, while bubbles restore your health. The main objective is to locate white pages to add to a book, and to destroy any evil blue pages you find.

▶ the team working on *Robin Of The Wood* differentiated it from *Nodes* further by making its world more cohesive. "It was an immersive environment, where you were flipping through loads of screens before you got to anything," Stuart reviews, "You were in the woods, and you would discover things, or you'd find a locked door that you couldn't get through until you found a key. You went inside a castle, there was the sheriff that arrested you, there were dungeons and there was a witch."

Unlike *Robin Of The Wood*'s antagonists, its less hostile characters lacked purpose, and so players were tasked with stealing from some and trading with others. "We wanted to introduce certain characters, so we had to think about what they could do," Stuart reasons. "Because if you had an ent and a druid then what was the point of them? You couldn't just have them walking around doing nothing, so we came up with some trading mechanics. The bishops were wealthy back in those days, so we thought that you could rob them. Then the druids were healers, so we thought about that."

» [ZX Spectrum] You steal gold in *Robin Of The Wood*, then trade it for weapons with an ent.

Of special note was *Robin Of The Wood*'s witch, who would offer Robin safe passage, heal him or transport him to far off places depending on how many flowers she was given. "Exchanging flowers with the witch was just a way to make the game longer, and to add complexity," Stuart considers. "There were too many games at the time that just had one mechanic, and what we wanted to do was add more layers so you would think about why you had to go from A to B. You had to collect this and you had to collect that. It was just trying to put more rational in there, to give you a reason for why you had to do things."

In addition to interacting and trading with characters, *Robin Of The Wood* also depicted its hero's health, although Stuart stops short of calling the game an RPG. "The RPG elements were subtle," Stuart argues. "The energy bar at the bottom of the screen took up a lot of room, so all of the RPG elements you collected like the bags of gold and flowers had to be squeezed in

» [ZX Spectrum] *Arc Of Yesod*'s robot opens up new areas of the game, much like the mole in *Nodes*.

underneath it. There wasn't a menu, but there didn't need to be because it was all displayed at the bottom of the screen."

On its release, critics liked *Robin Of The Wood* even more than *Nodes*, but as its designers finished working on it before its coders, their boss sent them back to Yesod. "*Robin Of The Wood* was taking a lot of programming resources," Stuart reflects, "but Paul McKenna said it had to be possible to take the code from *Nodes* and put different graphics in it without the programmers having to do much. So we designed more backgrounds and layouts and mechanics. Like instead of the mole, *Arc Of Yesod* had a little ball that fired lasers. I wanted the lasers to be like the ones in *Defender* – my favourite game."

Besides its armed sidekick, which unlike the mole in *Nodes* didn't have to be caught, *Arc Of Yesod* distinguished itself from its namesake with the addition of smart bombs. "The weapons were just to make *Arc* different from *Nodes*," Stuart clarifies. "We had also talked to quite a few people, and we realised that nobody was finding the mole. With *Arc* we weren't on the moon anymore, and that gave us the idea of having a spherical drone. We then designed different baddies and added smart bombs – which also came from *Defender*!"

Further variations followed, including teleporters that zapped Astro Charlie across great distances, in contrast to the short-range teleportation whirlwinds in *Nodes*. "The teleporters were straight out of *Lunar Jetman*!" Stuart grins. "They were a little bit more blatant than the whirlwinds in *Nodes*, and more colourful. We were trying to make *Arc* more industrial and more alien. So there were red chickens – which came from the Clangers, and a yellow section that was meant to be steam-punky. We also replaced the goat-beasts from *Nodes* with yellow robots with big noses."

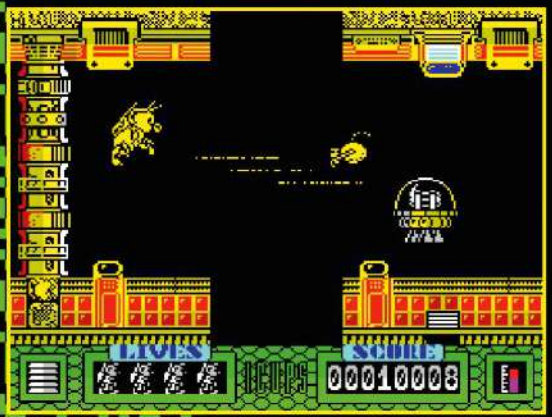
Predictably enough, *Arc Of Yesod* drew flack from reviewers for being too much like *Nodes*. But that didn't stop Odin giving Arc's big-nosed, yellow robot its own game. "*ICUPS* was meant to be much better, but it was limited by the skills of

"The bishops were wealthy back in those days, so we thought that you could rob them. Then the druids were healers, so we thought about that"

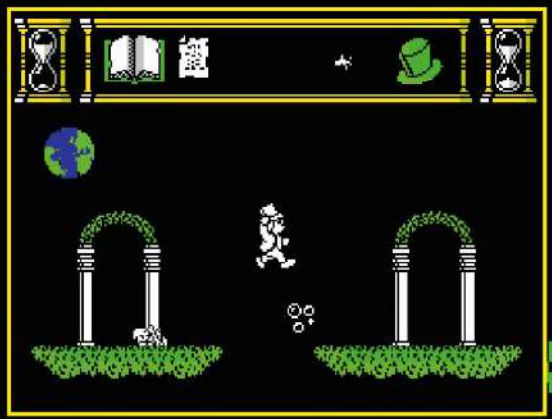
STUART FOTHERINGHAM

» [ZX Spectrum] Unlike *Nodes Of Yesod*, you collect every crystal in *Arc Of Yesod*, regardless of its colour.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Arc Of Yesod*'s teleporters are static, and transport you greater distances than the whirlwinds in *Nodes*.



» [ZX Spectrum] The hero in the second section of ICUPS is an opponent in *Arc Of Yesod*.



» [ZX Spectrum] There's a fair amount of jumping in *Heartland*, but there aren't any platforming challenges.

"Having weapons of increasing power was influenced by Ghosts 'N Goblins, and the baddies going to skeletons when they died was from that too"

STUART FOTHERINGHAM

▶ the coder," Stuart concedes. "Colin and I did the graphics, and it was related to *Nodes Of Yesod* – because Astro Charlie worked for an organisation called ICUPS it was supposed to be a scrolling shooter, inspired by our Saturday nights out when we used to go to the pub and play arcade games."

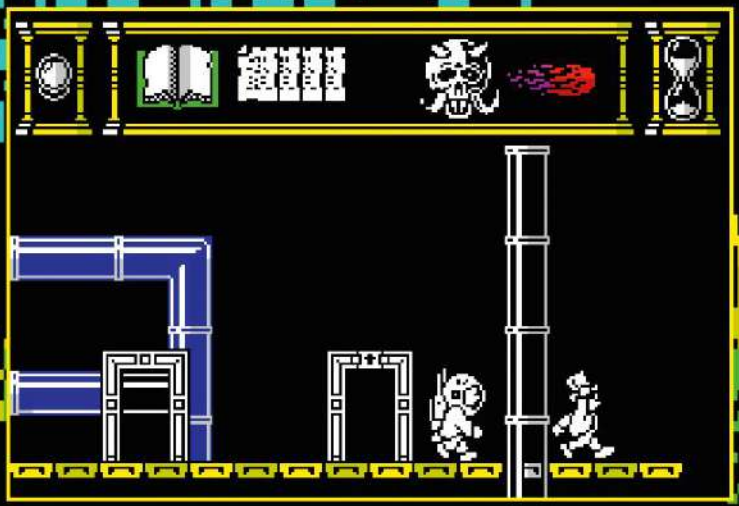
While the scrolling shooter in *ICUPS* was considered old hat, its maze section was praised, which was fortunate, as Odin's next game *Heartland* was a labyrinth. "Instead of a traditional map, the idea was that you could go left or right, and into and out of the screen," Stuart explains. "You also went behind and in front of some objects – like the big white plinths with unicorn statues on top. Colin liked the idea of a hero with a top hat. It was supposed to be playing off an idea of having Astro Charlie in different games, because he was originally going to be the hero in *Heartland*."

» [ZX Spectrum] Like the confusion-causing foes in the *Nodes* games, *Heartland*'s big star spells are to be avoided.

Of course, because *Heartland* was a massive maze, discovery became its primary goal, and to make this interesting its designers created a patchwork of contrasting worlds. "Exploration was a key part of *Heartland*, where you were trying to uncover the map," Stuart remarks. "The story started off in a statue park, then you went underground and through rooms full of subterranean pipes, and then to a space station with versions of Astro Charlie – which was a bit of an homage back to *Nodes*. Then there was a medieval village with stone walls and cottages, and finally a castle that led to a magic land with rainbow skies and caverns."

In addition to navigating *Heartland*'s sprawling stages, its developers made its hero's top hat a ranged weapon, although their game was never going to be a straight shooter. "The processing power of the Spectrum naturally limited the shoot-'em-up element in *Heartland*, because that restricted the number of baddies you could have on-screen," Stuart contemplates. "We were using masking when the enemies went behind and in front of objects, so we were restricted by how many could be masked at once while still having a reasonable framerate."

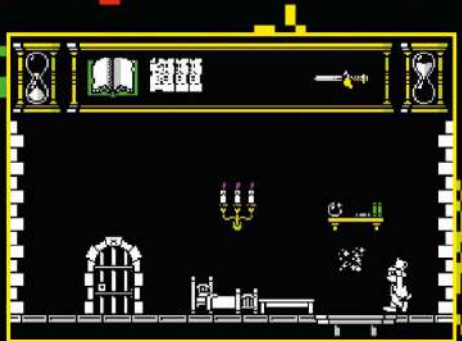
» [ZX Spectrum] In keeping with *Robin Of The Wood*, better weapons become available as you play through *Heartland*.



A popular coin-op inspired the *Heartland* team to add weapon upgrades and reanimated foes, but they stopped short of replicating the arcade game's platforming. "Having weapons of increasing power was influenced by *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, and the baddies going to skeletons when they died was from that too," Stuart acknowledges. "We did that previously in *Robin Of The Wood*, except that the enemies in *Robin* didn't resurrect themselves. But we couldn't have platforming because of the technical limitations of the masking."

Another element was incorporated into *Heartland* that enhanced the game while not using too much memory, which came in the form of spells that acted as power-ups. "*Heartland* was supposed to be magical; that was why there were all sorts of spells. They had to be small but still recognisable, so we picked bubbles and stars – and that sort of thing. Having them float in the air and having gaps in the floor to jump over was to give you a reason to jump, which helped to use the screen more." Like its popular predecessors, *Heartland* reviewed well, but its team left Odin soon after. Some former Odin staff later designed a 16-bit sequel, but it didn't get very far. "*Heart Of Yesod* would have had Astro Charlie going on different adventures to different locations," Stuart says, thinking back. "He would be wearing different hats depending on where he was going – like Mr Benn. So he might have a knight's helmet on, or an old-fashioned diver's helmet. That was the idea, but I don't think publishers were keen on it."

Reflecting on Odin's arcade adventures now, Stuart has tweaks he'd make to *Nodes Of Yesod* and one regret concerning *Heartland*, but he's clearly still proud of them all. "I think I'd put signage in *Nodes* saying you need to get a mole, and where to dig holes," Stuart ponders. "And I'd just have one shape of Alchiem and one end location. *Robin Of The Wood* is still a great game, and so is *Heartland* – although it was such a shame that my C64 graphics weren't used for that. But they were all good." ✱



STAGES OF EVOLUTION: FIRE AWAY!

HOW SHOOTING ARROWS AND FIRING LASERS LED TO CASTING SPELLS

ROBIN OF THE WOOD

You've got to work hard to get a ranged weapon in *Robin Of The Wood*, but that reflects how outmatched the hero is in the source material. Firstly, you need to find and rob three sheriffs of their gold, and trade that for a sword and bow, and having done that you need to find arrows.

ARC OF YESOD

The sidekick in *Arc Of Yesod* is armed, unlike the mole in *Nodes*, which has to ram enemies to dispatch them. As well as providing a welcome shoot-'em-up element, this gives Arc's helper the advantage over the mole of being able to protect its operator from any position on the screen.

HEARTLAND

Heartland can be unforgiving, even with a permanent weapon in the form of a top hat. The problem is that it takes three hits from it to put foes down, so it's just as well that there are sword and fireball spells in the later levels that can kill enemies with just one or two shots.

Peripheral Vision

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Expansion Module #2

» **PLATFORM:** ColecoVision » **RELEASED:** 1983
» **COST:** £49.95 (launch), £45+ (today, boxed) £25+ (today, unboxed)

It's easy to see that arcade games were central to the sales strategy for the ColecoVision. The console was sold on the quality of its conversion of *Donkey Kong*, and Coleco soon licensed plenty of other hits from the likes of Data East, Universal, Midway and Sega. The impetus for Expansion Module #2 was provided by the conversion of Sega's popular driving game *Turbo* – the arcade game had used a steering wheel and pedals, so to add authenticity to the experience, the home game would too. What's more, the game and peripheral would be bundled together to ensure that players enjoyed the game as intended.

The wheel functioned much like an analogue paddle controller, while the pedal was a simple digital switch. When not in use, the pedal was stored in a bay to the right of the wheel. However, when it was removed the second joystick controller could be inserted into the vacant storage bay for use as a gear stick – a simple but clever way to repurpose existing parts for extra functionality. *Destructor* and *The Dukes Of Hazzard* also require the use of Expansion Module #2, while it is an optional controller for *Bump 'N Jump* and *Pitstop*.

Expansion Module #2 fact

■ Unlike Expansion Module #1, an Atari 2600 compatibility module, Expansion Module #2 plugged into the ColecoVision's regular control ports rather than using the front expansion bay.

ESSENTIAL GAME
Turbo

An early part of Sega's great arcade racing heritage that is often overlooked today, *Turbo* was considered to be an excellent game in its day. This conversion was also regarded as being highly impressive too, so it made very good sense to bundle it with the peripheral. The object of the game is simple – you're racing against the clock, and the only way to earn a time extension is to pass enough rival racers while avoiding crashes. The varied locations were extremely impressive at the time, as you'll move from city areas to snowy forests, waterfront areas and tunnels.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

FAMICOM

Plenty of Famicom games crossed the Pacific thanks to Nintendo's dominance of American console gaming in the latter half of the Eighties, but many still never reached the NES. Nick Thorpe inspects some intriguing imports…

» [Famicom] This dinosaur is a bit stupid, and is about to walk into the very obvious trap we've set for it. [No wonder they went extinct - Ed]

» [Famicom] Springboard jumps have to be timed carefully, as landing on an enemy will still kill you.

BOOBY KIDS

■ DEVELOPER: **NICHIBUTSU** ■ YEAR: **1987**

■ **Do we have your attention now?** Good, then we'll begin by clearing up any misconceptions you might have about this rather unfortunate title – this is a game in which kids set booby-traps. There's nothing untoward going on here at all. But we're glad to have piqued your interest, because *Booby Kids* happens to be a rather neat game that combines elements of other maze games into a unique and fascinating experience of its own.

Taking control of a kid, your goal is to run around each stage collecting all of whichever main item is on offer – it varies based on setting, from fruit and scrolls to computer monitors – before dashing to the exit door. A variety of enemies will naturally try to stop you, but that's where the traps come in. Pressing the B button digs a hole ahead of you, and if an enemy falls into it, you've got a few options. You can leave them in there to delay them, you can stand on top of them for a while to earn extra points, or you can fill the hole in to kill them and send them to the respawn point. If you do opt for the kill, a little mound representing the body will appear to prevent you from digging in that spot again, and a power-up may spawn.

Getting to the required items can be tricky, and that's where warp points, springboards, bridges and other obstacles come in. The most notable impediments are the destructible walls that appear in some stages – fortunately, you can pick up bombs to deal with them, *Bomberman*-style. These will also kill enemies whether they're walking around or trapped in a hole, and they can even destroy enemy spawn points. However, you don't start with any, you can only carry up to nine at a time and they're not available in every stage.

Booby Kids looks good, has some enjoyable tunes and plays well, but it's not without faults. Like so many 8-bit games, it hides a lot of information from the player. Bomb pickup points have to be found via trial and error as they look exactly like regular scenery, and destructible scenery is not highlighted at all. In one stage we had no idea where we had to dig a hole to activate a hidden bridge, because unlike in the stage where the mechanic was introduced, there was no indication of where it might be. Also, it'd be really nice if you couldn't just blunder into the water and die.

Still, those faults are not deal breakers. If you're looking for a good game with which to kick off a new Famicom collection, this ambitious and varied game will suit you, and it requires no knowledge of Japanese.

Booby Kids hasn't shown up on eBay recently, but loose cartridges are cheap and plentiful on Yahoo Auctions Japan, selling for an average price of around ¥500 (approximately £3.30). If you're a stickler for having a box and manual, you may need to pay a hefty premium – complete copies have gone between ¥2,800 (£18.60) and ¥11,500 (£76.35), so it could pay to be patient and wait for a bargain. As long as you can live with having it in your internet search history, we'd recommend giving it a go.

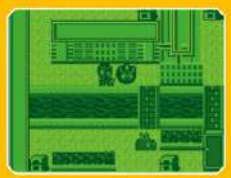
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

HEIANKYO ALIEN
GAME BOY

■ Although the trapping attack is slower, this remake of the pioneering Seventies arcade game includes one of the core mechanics that inspired *Booby Kids*. This version is still a lot of fun to play, as it includes an old version mimicking the original coin-op and a new version with updated graphics.

MEGA BOMBERMAN
MEGA DRIVE

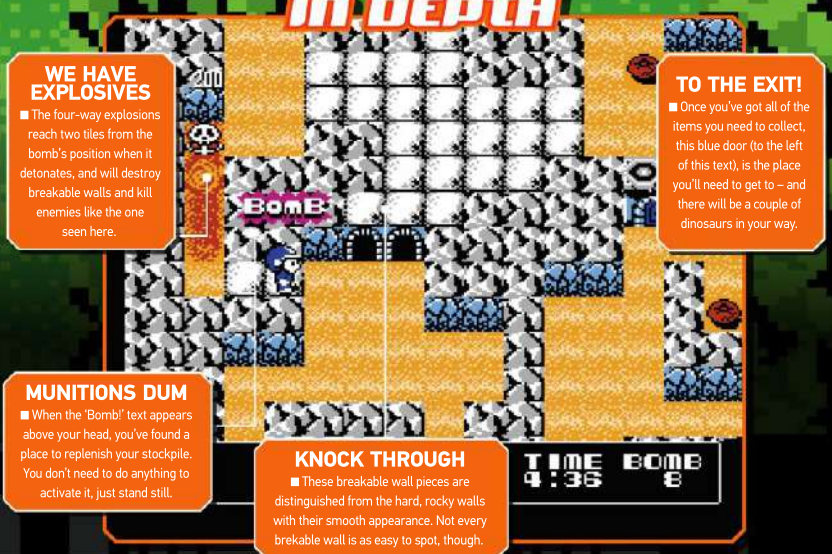
■ The other part of the arsenal in *Booby Kids* comes from the *Bomberman* games, and this is one of the more popular and easily accessible entries in the series, at least as far as UK players are concerned. Solo monster slaying is fine, but multiplayer is obviously where the real fun is to be found.



BOOBY BOYS
GAME BOY

■ As soon as they hear the familiar music, fans of *Booby Kids* will know that *Booby Boys* is a direct successor to the NES game. The stages seem to be tighter maze designs as compared to those of its predecessor, and you get to choose your starting stage from a variety of different background themes.

IN DEPTH



WE HAVE EXPLOSIVES
■ The four-way explosions reach two tiles from the bomb's position when it detonates, and will destroy breakable walls and kill enemies like the one seen here.

TO THE EXIT!
■ Once you've got all of the items you need to collect, this blue door (to the left of this text), is the place you'll need to get to – and there will be a couple of dinosaurs in your way.

MUNITIONS DUM
■ When the 'Bomb!' text appears above your head, you've found a place to replenish your stockpile. You don't need to do anything to activate it, just stand still.

KNOCK THROUGH
■ These breakable wall pieces are distinguished from the hard, rocky walls with their smooth appearance. Not every brekable wall is as easy to spot, though.

Minority Report

CRISIS FORCE

■ DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** ■ YEAR: **1991**

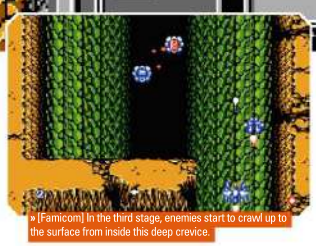
■ **Japanese Famicom owners didn't have the famous Nintendo seal of quality on their games, largely because buyers didn't need that kind of assurance.** In its absence, we'd imagine many players just looked for the Konami logo as a sign of a good product. Players loved the likes of *Gradius*, *Contra*, *Castlevania* and *Metal Gear*, and the company made a good deal of money on the platform. Of course the company had the occasional duffer here and there, but one of its best games for the Famicom was unfortunately widely overlooked – this one, in case you hadn't guessed.

Crisis Force was Konami's final Famicom shoot-'em-up, and the developer went all out to make it the very best. The game is an audiovisual treat, which is largely because the VRC4 mapper chip allows for special effects like vertical column scrolling to create a parallax effect, as well as more standard static backgrounds that still look awesome.

You can change between three attack types at will, focusing on frontal, side and rear attacks, with each having two fire modes depending on the power-ups you collect. The game is much more forgiving than the likes of *Gradius* due to the way the weapon system works – rather than taking one hit and losing all of your power-ups immediately, you instead lose a power level for each hit, only dying when you can lose no more. The game even includes simultaneous multiplayer, which is quite a feat given everything happening during play. Unfortunately, the late release of the game worked against it as many players had already moved to the Super Famicom, so it didn't sell so well. High demand means it attracts prices of £80+ just for a loose cart.

» [Famicom] The line scrolling effects in the chasm are quite spectacular to see in a Famicom game.

» [Famicom] *Crisis Force* is excellent graphically, with both detailed backgrounds and plenty of action in the foreground.



» [Famicom] In the third stage, enemies start to crawl up to the surface from inside this deep crevice.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» JONGBOU

■ DEV: **MICRONICS/SNK**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ Here's a neat little genre fusion that really couldn't have made it to the NES library. The game takes the *Breakout* template and populates most of the field with Mahjong tiles, which will flip over when hit once and fall when hit again. If you catch a tile with your paddle, you can add it to your hand, and if you can complete a winning 14 tile hand then you'll beat the stage. It's fun, but only with the requisite knowledge.

» GORBY NO PIPELINE DAISAKUSEN

■ DEV: **COMPILE**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Japan and the Soviet Union are building a water pipeline connecting Tokyo to Moscow, and you're in charge of construction. Pipe pieces fall from the top of the screen and the goal is to fit them together to connect from left to right. Meet your quota and you'll move to a new, tougher stage. It's not Compile's best puzzler – that's *Puyo Puyo* – but you'll be glasnost to have passed it by. [Your P45 is in the post – Ed.]

» NUTS & MILK

■ DEV: **HUDSON SOFT**
■ YEAR: **1984**

■ This single-screen platformer is one of the earliest third-party games for the Famicom, and it's good, simple fun. You play as Milk, and your goal is to gather all the fruit on the screen while avoiding your rival Nuts and various environmental hazards, before making your way home to your girlfriend Yogurt. The name is silly but if you love arcade games like *Bomb Jack* or *Rod Land*, you'll feel right at home with this.

» CROSS FIRE

■ DEV: **KYUGO BOEKI**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ Everyone loves *Contra*, even though it's really hard. So, Kyugo Boeki thought, why not do a game like that – but this time *really* show the player who's in charge? *Cross Fire* starts you without a gun, leaving you to rely on your fists alone, and includes plenty of background baddies that can only be killed with a gun. You get a health bar as a concession towards fairness, but there's still a steep learning curve here.

COSMIC EPSILON

■ DEVELOPER: **HOME DATA** ■ YEAR: **1989**

■ The success of *Space Harrier* in arcades naturally tempted a few developers to try to imitate it in the home, but the 8-bit machines of the Eighties were not ideally equipped to replicate its impressive scaling graphics. Compared to most efforts, *Cosmic Epsilon* is a mile ahead – while it might not look like much in still screenshots, the ground whizzes by smoothly and is so impressive as to make a mockery of Takara's official version of *Space Harrier*. Enemy sprites can be a little small, but move around relatively smoothly too. The game is also one of the very few that offers support for the Famicom 3D System.

Compared to Sega's arcade hit, there are some gameplay differences to be found. Regular shots don't have the slight homing property, but it's easier to aim because the laser shots originate above your character. If you need homing attacks, a limited supply can be used with the A button. Power-ups exist in this game, and you can head to space in some of the eight stages too. The only question is whether or not you'll ever get to see all of them, as *Cosmic Epsilon* is as tough as it is impressive, and doesn't even offer the option to continue after death. Even if the thought of that kind of challenge puts you off actually playing it, you should still take a look at a video of the game just to see Nintendo's hardware being stretched.

» [Famicom] You can see here how the laser satellites give you a good view of your targets.

» [Famicom] The second stage takes you to space, without capitalism but with war. Would Tim Curry be OK with that?

RETRO STINKER

» TAKESHI NO CHOUSENJOU

■ TAITO ■ 1986

■ We know it has the star power of Takeshi Kitano and it's deliberately bad, but it's still not fun to play. Watch someone else suffer through it instead.

» FLYING HERO

■ DEV: **AICOM**
■ YEAR: **1989**

■ Buildings are on fire, and apparently short of budget, the fire department has sent one brave rescue trampolinist and a couple of blokes to help move him around. Yes, it's another paddle game. This time, you're rescuing people from windows, putting out fires and collecting power-ups. If that reminds you of the Sega Mark III game *Megumi Rescue*, well done – it's by the developer of the original, unreleased arcade version.

» BINARY LAND

■ DEV: **HUDSON SOFT**
■ YEAR: **1985**

■ Gurin and Malon are penguins in love, and they've got to escape the maze without getting trapped by spiders. It's your job to help both of them – and you'll be controlling both simultaneously, with one moving left when the other goes right, and vice versa. The asymmetrical nature of the mazes makes it tough to reach the goal simultaneously, so if you're after a genuine mental workout in your games, look no further.

» UCHUU KEIBITAI SDF

■ DEV: **HAL LABORATORY**
■ YEAR: **2006**

■ This is a really strong vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up, which manages to cram plenty of enemies on screen at various points. Stage design is diverse, as the game mixes up restrictive areas and open ones with plenty of scope for scrolling, similar to how *Gradius* does. This isn't a challenge for the faint of heart, but those with the patience – plus the budget, as it's expensive – will find that it's worth persevering with.

» ARMADILLO

■ DEV: **AIM**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ It's a cute animal mascot platform game, and just like a slightly more famous character from 1991, Billy The Shell can roll into a ball to defeat enemies. That's where the similarities to Sonic end, though – in *Armadillo*, you'll switch between the precise but vulnerable upright form and the chaotic, destructive ball form. It's a really nice game in all respects, and it's sad that the planned American release fell through.

1PLAYER
00972870
HISCORE
01000000
2PLAY
16

Nitro Ball

ALL HAIL THE PINBALL WARRIORS

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE » 1992 » DATA EAST

Do you remember the *Mad Max* game that came out in 2015? It sold quite well and seemed to find an appreciative audience, despite the fact that critics at the time felt it to be fairly average. The divide came down to one thing – reviewers had played plenty of those Ubisoft-style open world games in quick succession, and had become a bit bored of them. But even if you're not reviewing games, if you play enough of them you may find that boredom with staple genres is a real threat. That's why I find myself attracted to oddities and unusual genre fusions. If you can sell me a combination of 'genre A meets genre B' that I haven't encountered before, I'll probably give it a try.

That's why I love games like *Nitro Ball*. I like to imagine the pitch meeting at Data East, where the higher-ups sit dumbfounded as a developer presents pinball as the one thing that would have improved a game like *Mercs*. That's what *Nitro Ball* is – a vertically scrolling run-and-gun, with the game show presentation of *Smash TV* and plenty of stage furniture inspired by pinball. Enemies can be knocked back into holes for bonuses, spinners dispense prizes – and what do prizes make? [Ooh, I know! Points - Ed] There are bonus sections where you have to knock down all the targets in a certain time limit, and you can even turn into a giant ball and rampage around the screen, crushing everything in your path. It's great fun, until the first boss starts rolling into you for some payback. There are some excellent presentational touches too, as each stage is themed like a pinball table, with the end of level scoreboard featuring cool artwork representing the stage.

Nitro Ball is a very good game which is a little bit unconventional and chaotic, and sometimes that can work against it – it can feel pretty overwhelming at times. But it doesn't feel quite like anything else out there, and when you've played hundreds of games, sometimes that's just better than another competent take on something you've utterly played to death.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

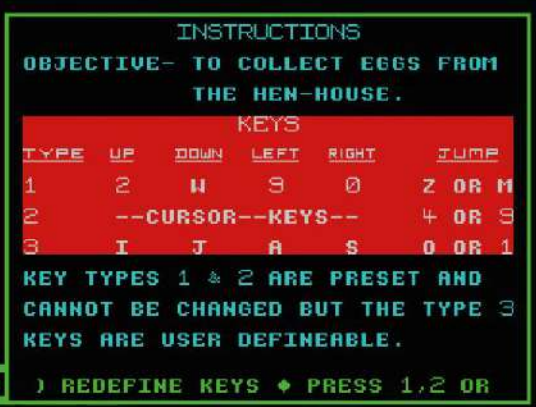
CHUCKIE EGG

CHUCKIE EGG IS ONE OF 8-BIT COMPUTING'S MOST RENOWNED PLATFORM GAMES, ESPECIALLY ON THE ZX SPECTRUM AND BBC MICRO. JOIN RETRO GAMER AS WE CELEBRATE THIS EGG-SHELL-ENT GAME FROM THE SCRAMBLED MIND OF TEENAGE CODER NIGEL ALDERTON. [THAT'S ENOUGH EGG PUNS, THANKS – ED]

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

Throughout the Eighties, rivalries ran deep and often within the UK home computing scene. Of course, ZX Spectrum versus Commodore 64 was one of the biggest conflicts; yet even within each computer's sphere there were other, smaller skirmishes where fans of a particular game or genre would espouse its virtues over any competitor. [It's never stopped - Ed] In the early days of the ZX Spectrum in particular, there was one such battle, instigated by the release of two classic platform games: the slower pace and puzzle-solving of *Manic Miner* versus the quick-fire bird-dodging of Nigel Alderton's fantastic *Chuckie Egg*.

Chuckie Egg begins quaintly. The scene is a country farmyard, owned by a stout farmer named Hen House Harry. Within each segment of Harry's hen enclosure there are a selection of eggs (between nine and a round dozen) which our brave agriculturalist must gather in order to sell at his local market. Also dotted around each screen are little piles of corn, collection of which is not necessary to complete a level; instead, these temporarily pause the timer while also giving Harry a small score bonus.


INSTRUCTIONS
OBJECTIVE- TO COLLECT EGGS FROM THE HEN-HOUSE.
KEYS
TYPE UP DOWN LEFT RIGHT JUMP
1 2 W 9 0 Z OR M
2 --CURSOR--KEYS-- 4 OR 8
3 I J A S O OR 1
KEY TYPES 1 & 2 ARE PRESET AND CANNOT BE CHANGED BUT THE TYPE 3 KEYS ARE USER DEFINEABLE.
) REDEFINE KEYS • PRESS 1,2 OR

» [ZX Spectrum] *Chuckie Egg* includes the option to redefine its keys, a rare thing in 1983.

» [ZX Spectrum] Stage two includes the first gap in the floor, but otherwise it's a simple affair.

But things have gotten a little weird inside Harry's hen enclosure. While the Mother Duck hovers impatiently within her cage, tall ducklings – resembling aggressive ostriches – patrol each screen, waiting to corner Harry and remove one of his lives. Furthermore, each stage is craftily crammed full of platforms, ladders, gaps and lifts. While Harry is in possession of a limited jump and can scoot across the floor swiftly, falling between the lowest gaps on the screen is lethal to the diminutive egg collector. Conversely, he can fall the entire length of the hen house without penalty – a useful escape method if the ducklings are closing in.

The ducklings each occupy a preordained path, guarding eggs while pecking at any corn they encounter. Over the course of eight increasingly devilish stages, these large birds must be avoided using the ladders and platforms as, unlike in *Chuckie Egg*'s great rival *Manic Miner*, the enemies cannot be jumped ▶

"The C64 version was straightforward but I wanted to take advantage of the enhanced capabilities of the Atari"
Sean Townsend

CHUCKIE EGG

EGG-SHELL-ENT PLAYING TIPS

EXCUSE THE PUNS AND FIND OUT HOW TO BECOME A HIGH-CLASS HEN HOUSE HARRY

KNOW THE SCORE

While there's no strict route to *Chuckie Egg*'s stages, there's always an optimum method according to the time-stopping corn and the pattern of the ducklings. By the time you're on the Mother Duck *and* ducklings a lot of this will go out of the window and it'll be more about simply staying alive.

HELL-EVATOR

Ah, the lifts. Inspired by the arcade game *Donkey Kong*, these rising slabs of yellow are the true test of *Chuckie Egg*. Fortunately for ZX Spectrum fans, Hen House Harry clips onto lifts should you slightly miss, yet it becomes more of a challenge once the Mother Duck finally leaves her cage in stage nine. Oh, and don't forget to get off the lift before it reaches the top.

THE MAIZE IN THE MAZE

If you're chasing a high score, those little piles of corn are invaluable in *Chuckie Egg*, each one accruing 50 points and a brief pause of the timer. Determined to grab them all? Then you've gotta be quick, as the ducklings will greedily peck away at any corn that is in front of them.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE SELL BY DATE

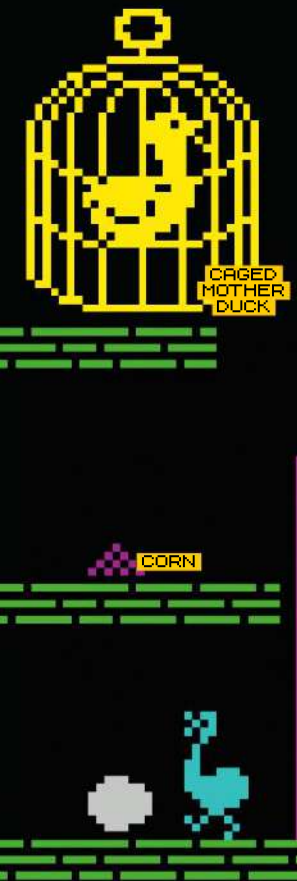
Those eggs aren't going to collect themselves, and while the time allotment initially appears generous, later levels can see that counter ticking down a little faster than Harry would like. Some stages such as the one pictured require a lot of backtracking; add in a chasing Mother Duck and Harry really has to keep his eye on the clock.

MIND THE GAP

While Harry can fall extreme distances without a scratch, should he slip through one of the holes in the floor, he'll lose a life. From stage two onwards there are varying degrees of gaps to watch out for, especially under the lifts. Fortunately, the ducklings cannot jump so if there's one on the other side of a gap, there's some temporary respite.

CRAZY PHYSICS

While many of *Chuckie Egg*'s ports included realistic physics, there's no such thing in the Spectrum original as poor Harry literally bounces around the levels, crazily rebounding off the green platforms. Worse are the invisible walls to the left and right: mistime a jump and Harry will miss the platform, usually into a waiting gap below.



» [ZX Spectrum] By stage 4, Harry has to get uncomfortably close to the Mother Duck in order to retrieve an egg.

» [ZX Spectrum] The first big challenge: stage three and its fast-moving lifts. Who puts lifts in a hen house?

over. Each location increases the risk for Harry: stage one contains just two ducklings and nothing else to harm the farmer. Stage two introduces a hazardous gap in the bottom floor while the third stage brings the first of those troublesome lifts, a pair of open and quickly rising yellow slabs that can be used to rapidly ascend to the top of the screen. A genuine health and safety nightmare, failure to correctly alight onto a lift results in Harry plummeting downwards and into the gap below – another life gone. By stage four, the platforms are more devious with small gaps, broken ladders and treacherously perched eggs combining to make the egg collecting quest highly perilous. But for Harry, there's far worse to come.

From the very first screen of *Chuckie Egg*, the Mother Duck sits waiting in its cage high in the top left of the display. Throughout the first eight screens the player wonders what's going to happen with this plump imprisoned mum, enraged at the pilfering of her eggs beneath her. Upon completing stage eight, Harry is sent back

» [ZX Spectrum] Some piles of corn are impossible to collect before a duckling snaps them up.

CONVERSION CAPERS

COMMODORE 64

While it doesn't look too much like the Spectrum original, there's a certain appeal to the C64 game. The main sprite is ridiculously large (albeit multicoloured), lacks Harry's ZX zip and has an irritating sound effect every time he jumps. Yet somehow it all hangs together and plays fluently enough.

ATARI 800

The Atari 800 game looks substantially different thanks to its impressive pseudo 3D effect platforms. We've also probably got the tallest Harry here although fortunately he can still navigate the stages with aplomb, although how that supremely irritating jump sound effect got through is anyone's guess.

BBC MICRO

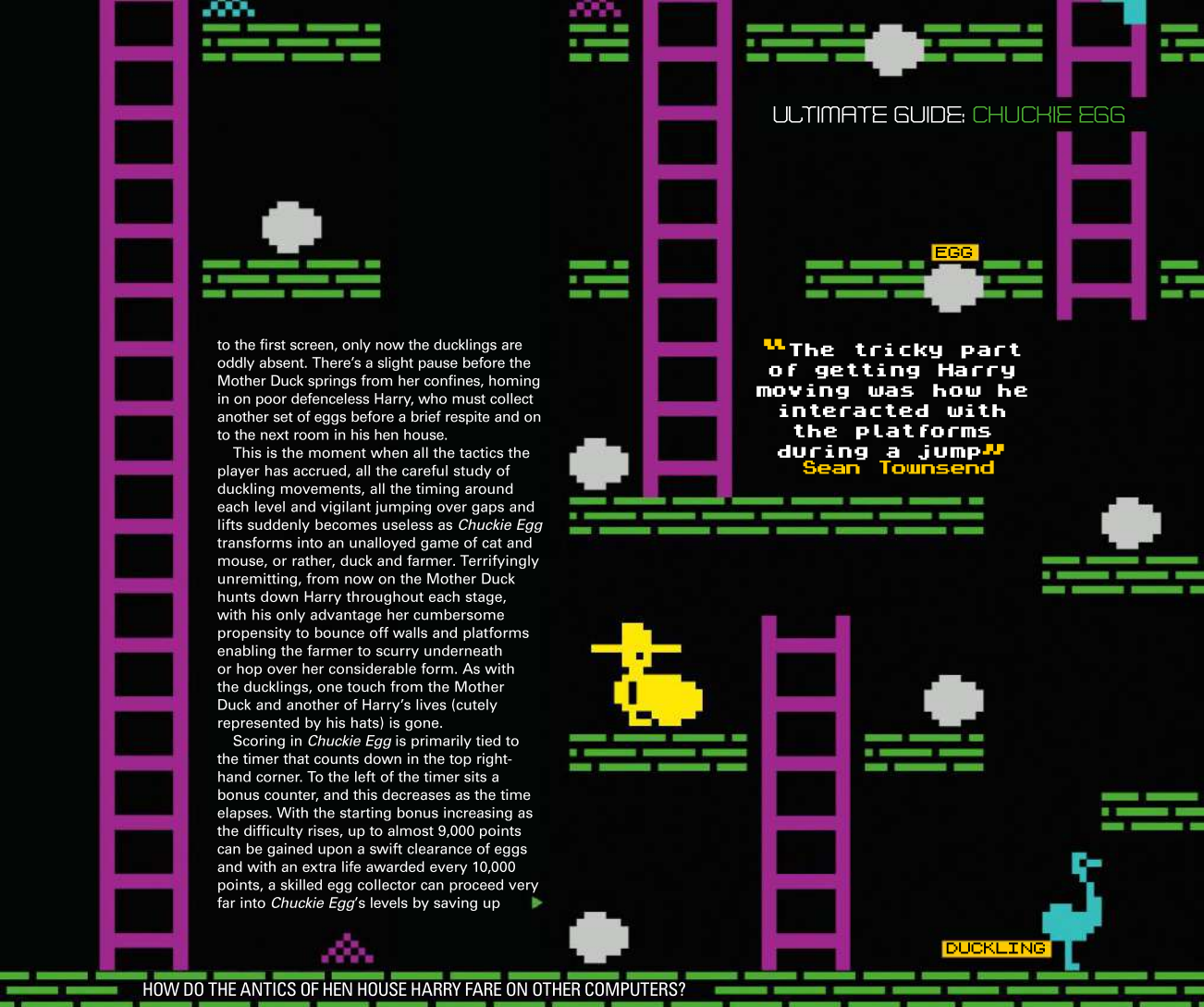
Coded by A 'n' F boss Doug Anderson himself, this BBC Micro version of *Chuckie Egg* is the closest port in terms of display and considered superior in terms of gameplay by many thanks to its realistic physics. While it's an extremely close run thing, we just prefer the charisma of the Spectrum version.

AMSTRAD CPC

The Amstrad CPC is another excellent stab at *Chuckie Egg* and shows no sign of cracking up against the Spectrum and BBC Micro versions. A slightly squatter screen display does the game no harm and Harry zips across the screen with the help of some sharp controls. This version also contains the nicest looking eggs.

DRAGON 32/64

It's hard not to admire A 'n' F's desire to ensure its star game got to as many platforms as possible and this Dragon 32 game, written by Mike Webb, is another commendable effort. Harry's gained a few pounds, but again, despite cosmetic differences, this is another decent albeit overly green take on Nigel Alderton's classic.



to the first screen, only now the ducklings are oddly absent. There's a slight pause before the Mother Duck springs from her confines, homing in on poor defenceless Harry, who must collect another set of eggs before a brief respite and on to the next room in his hen house.

This is the moment when all the tactics the player has accrued, all the careful study of duckling movements, all the timing around each level and vigilant jumping over gaps and lifts suddenly becomes useless as *Chuckie Egg* transforms into an unalloyed game of cat and mouse, or rather, duck and farmer. Terrifyingly unremitting, from now on the Mother Duck hunts down Harry throughout each stage, with his only advantage her cumbersome propensity to bounce off walls and platforms enabling the farmer to scurry underneath or hop over her considerable form. As with the ducklings, one touch from the Mother Duck and another of Harry's lives (cutely represented by his hats) is gone.

Scoring in *Chuckie Egg* is primarily tied to the timer that counts down in the top right-hand corner. To the left of the timer sits a bonus counter, and this decreases as the time elapses. With the starting bonus increasing as the difficulty rises, up to almost 9,000 points can be gained upon a swift clearance of eggs and with an extra life awarded every 10,000 points, a skilled egg collector can proceed very far into *Chuckie Egg*'s levels by saving up ▶

> "The tricky part of getting Harry moving was how he interacted with the platforms during a jump"
> Sean Townsend

HOW DO THE ANTICS OF HEN HOUSE HARRY FARE ON OTHER COMPUTERS?

ELECTRON

While similar visually to the BBC Micro, there's a little slice of flicker to contend with in this Electron port, which can be a little off-putting at times. Otherwise it's virtually identical to its bigger brother and is ultimately another excellent way to play *Chuckie Egg* for owners of the Acorn home computer.

MSX

Full of colour, especially Harry's natty green hat, this is possibly the fastest version of *Chuckie Egg*. It's fantastic fun to begin with but a couple of things mark it down. Firstly, the jump mechanic isn't as refined as it could be. Secondly, getting on lifts is unnecessarily pedantic, sucking much of the enjoyment out.

ATARI ST

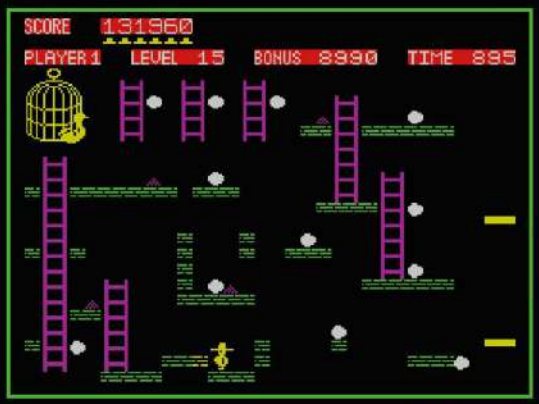
Somewhere between the original game's release late in 1983 and this Atari ST port five years later, Hen House Harry has morphed into an egg himself. In-game, Harry bizarrely explodes into a fried egg when caught by the ducklings but the backgrounds are improved as are the duckling sprites.

PC

Playing on the recommended EGA mode, this DOS version, coded by Ste Cork, runs at a fast pace and boasts a (free) range of colourful backdrops that won't help anybody predisposed to headaches. Harry himself looks good and moves swiftly, although the ducklings also have an increased turn of speed.

AMIGA

This is almost identical to its fellow 16-bit version of *Chuckie Egg* and includes the same issues with Harry The Egg's inflexible jump. There are plenty of attractive graphical flourishes, more pretty backdrops and jaunty tunes but it sadly lacks the inspired exuberance and enjoyment of the Spectrum original.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Mother Duck is out and after Harry!

» [ZX Spectrum] Fourth time around there are two more ducklings for Harry to contend with.

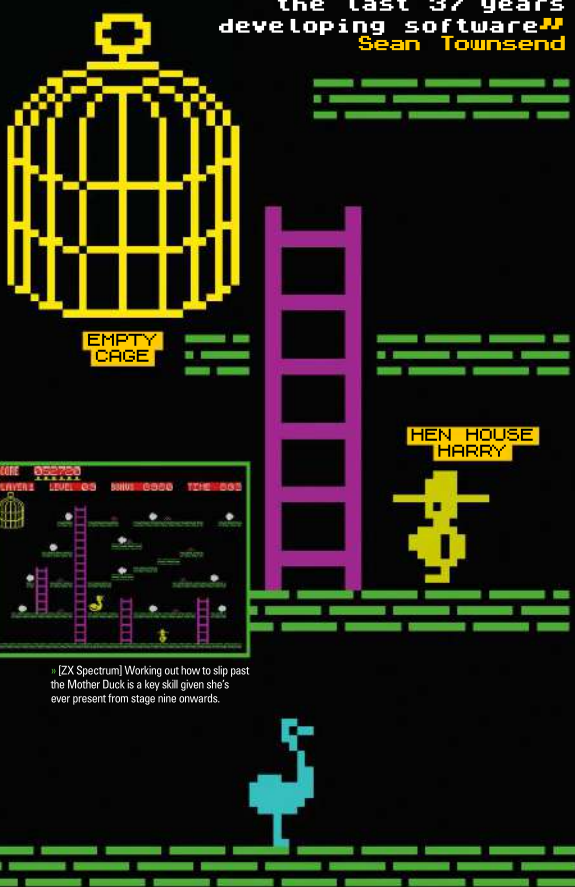
those extra lives. Furthermore, gathering up a pile of corn nets Harry 50 points while collecting an egg yields him 100 points.

Yet with *Chuckie Egg*'s difficulty rising sharply with both Mother Duck and double ducklings eventually chasing after Harry, each of those extra lives will come in very handy as the game proceeds.

The skills required in *Chuckie Egg* go far beyond mere pixel-perfect jumping. In fact, that trait is almost non-existent with the player needing to call upon alternate abilities in order to navigate the hen house. Firstly, there are the lifts. Ever rising, it takes much practice and timing to perfect the correct jump onto the yellow slabs, although the game gives Harry a sporting chance by helping him up to safety should he be close enough. The farmer also bounces across the screen as if made of springy rubber. With open gaps proliferating as the game progresses, Harry must be very careful as he jumps, taking care not to rebound off a platform and into the inky depths below the hen house. These mechanics, welded to the agile abilities of Harry – there's no fussy positioning at the base of a ladder in *Chuckie Egg* – are what mark out the game from its pernickety peers and ensure that it is quite rightly regarded as a classic today, 38 years after its first release.

Chuckie Egg's legendary status has been cemented over the years by a series of reappearances, notably as a budget game and on Beau Jolly's compilation, *10 Computer Hits*.

> "It was the start of my programming career – without Chuckie Egg I doubt I'd have spent the last 37 years developing software"
> Sean Townsend

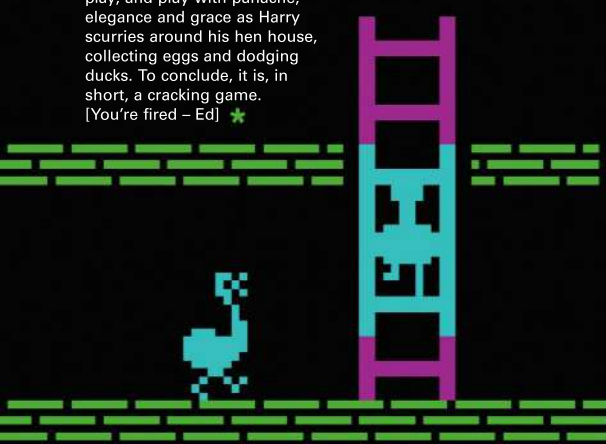


» [ZX Spectrum] Working out how to slip past the Mother Duck is a key skill given she's ever present from stage nine onwards.

» [ZX Spectrum] While it has its fans, *Chuckie Egg II* failed to match the original's charm and playability.

A consistent seller, A 'n' F published the game to a number of formats, with co-owner Doug Anderson achieving significant success with his BBC Micro port, the first to add realistic physics to Hen House Harry and the Mother Duck. Inevitably, A 'n' F's thoughts turned to a sequel, and with the game's original creator Nigel Alderton departed for Ocean Software, the publisher designed a substantially larger game in-house, with simple puzzle-solving and exploration added, making *Chuckie Egg II* more akin to *Jet Set Willy* and the *Wally Week* games than its famous forebear. While offering more variety and another decent seller, the spirit of the original is firmly absent from *Chuckie Egg II* with its lengthy boring stretches and frustrating caverns a long way from the concise and fast-paced excitement of Nigel Alderton's timeless masterpiece.

Because unlike its sequel, even today the tight controls and beautifully uncomplicated gameplay of *Chuckie Egg* make it a delight to play, and play with panache, elegance and grace as Harry scurries around his hen house, collecting eggs and dodging ducks. To conclude, it is, in short, a cracking game. [You're fired – Ed] ★



DEVELOPER INTERVIEW

RETRO GAMER TALKS TO THE MAN BEHIND BOTH THE COMMODORE 64 AND ATARI 800 CONVERSIONS OF CHUCKIE EGG, SEAN TOWNSEND

How did you get to work on C64 and Atari 800 *Chuckie Egg*?
I worked directly for A 'n' F on not only *Chuckie Egg* but also *Chuckie Egg II* and *Gumshoe*. I hadn't heard of [*Chuckie Egg*]. My first computer was a VIC-20 followed by the C64 and Atari, so I'd never seen any games for the Spectrum. Obviously I had to play it prior to converting it and I enjoyed it. Nigel did a great job.

Speaking of Nigel, did you ever meet him?
No, never met him and never had any assistance. However, I did get some help from Mike Webb who was working at A 'n' F at the time. Mike had done some of the other conversions so it was very familiar to him.

How did you go about writing the game?
It was done in stages. The first stage would have been getting the levels drawn on the screen. The C64 version was straightforward but I wanted to take advantage of the enhanced capabilities of the Atari. This can be seen with the 3D platforms and ladders and by the way Harry moves through the platforms while on the ladders.

What was the next stage?
Getting Harry to move around the level would be next. I used a dummy screen that used bits for each element and this is how I could easily tell if he was on a ladder or platform. The tricky part of getting Harry moving was how he interacted with the platforms during a jump but this was part of the *Chuckie Egg* DNA and had to be replicated almost exactly the same as the Spectrum version. The ducklings would be next, on the Atari version they were software sprites which I do remember taking a while to get working properly. Finally, the Mother Duck would be implemented and getting her moving around with momentum was very straightforward.

The main sprite is much larger – what happened there?
Hen House Harry is a multicolour sprite and to do this on the C64 you have to double the width and this is why he looks so wide compared to the single colour Spectrum and BBC versions.

Why did you use two colours then?
I don't think I would've got away with doing a single-coloured sprite on the C64 and Atari – both versions had better graphics capabilities and as such, a certain standard was expected.

Technically, how were the games developed?
Both versions were developed on an Atari 600XL using the superb MAC65 cartridge. Once assembled, the C64 version was sent down the serial port and a small BASIC program was typed to receive it. Also, the very talented Mike Webb wrote the fast loader for the cassette version.

You included Doug Anderson's improved inertia – how else do you think you did in retrospect?
Yes, it's in both versions and I believe it's something Nigel wished he'd implemented in the Spectrum version. Overall, I think I did a pretty good job, especially as it was my first published game. Some of the comments on YouTube rave about the Atari version and others slate it. It's the same with the C64. But it was the start of my programming career – without *Chuckie Egg* I doubt I'd have spent the last 37 years developing software.

Our thanks to Sean for his time.

» PUSHING THE LIMITS

Metal Slug 3

How this classic run-and-gun showed that decade-old technology could still handle hardcore action

» **PLATFORM:** NEO GEO » **RELEASED:** 2000 » **DEVELOPER:** SNK

Sequels are tricky things at the best of times, and they're harder when you're trying to squeeze extra performance out of dated technology. *Metal Slug 2* is a great example of this, as its wonderful game design is hampered by severe slowdown. Having seen that, many people would have wondered if SNK's venerable Neo Geo hardware had finally reached the point of obsolescence. To prove the doubters wrong, SNK issued the revised *Metal Slug X*, a remix of *Metal Slug 2* featuring a new engine that fixed the issues of the original release.

That engine would go on to power something even more impressive, in the form of *Metal Slug 3*. This was SNK at the peak of its pixel-pushing power, with 2D artwork that qualifies as some of the best ever seen in a videogame. It was impossible not to admire the smooth animation of the sea creatures and giant insects that attacked you as you made your way through the first stage, and the sheer scale of the bosses somehow managed to eclipse that of the end of level baddies from the first two games.

Much of the visual splendour of the game was down to its enormous 708 megabit ROM capacity – over twice the original 330 megabit spec the hardware was designed for, and a size that allowed for enormous amounts of animation data. But the team also deserves credit for working within the boundaries of the hardware, as the massive numbers of sprites being displayed could easily have caused problems with flickering and speed, yet the game runs smoothly and without noticeable graphical glitches.

Metal Slug 3 is noticeably harder than the previous games in the series, and fans will debate whether *Metal Slug 3* is the best of the bunch or just the most impressive. It's very easy to find out for yourself though – as well as the Neo Geo MVS and AES versions, the game was released for PS2 and Xbox and was part of *Metal Slug Anthology* for PS2, PSP and Wii. It has also been made widely available on downloadable games services, with versions for Apple and Android mobile devices, all current consoles, and even older consoles including the Xbox 360, PS3 and Vita. The Neo Geo and Limited Run Games releases are pricey, but other versions are affordable, especially PS2 and Xbox.

HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...

Smooth Shading

The Neo Geo can only use 16 colours in a single palette, but you'd never guess it to look at the sand or the sky here. SNK's artists were experts at squeezing incredible details from a fairly limited selection of colours.

Amazing Animation

It looks like there are semi-transparent colours overlaid on the building to the right, doesn't it? But that's not the case – the artists simply faked the effect with good animation, drawing lighting effects onto the sprite.

Sprite Saving

The Neo Geo can only display so many sprites on a single scanline, and backgrounds count towards the limit. Yet even with plenty of overlapping enemies, explosions and other effects, there are no disappearing lines seen here.

Consistent Carnage

There's always loads going on in *Metal Slug 3*, and you might expect the ageing Motorola 68000 CPU to struggle to keep up with it all. Yet the programmers expertly avoided any issues, keeping the action fast and responsive.

THE MAKING OF theme PARK

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

» [PlayStation] If your rides were extreme enough, you could cause your little people to literally fly off the rails and directly at you into the screen.

» [PC] You'll get all sorts of useful help and advice during play. If one of your visitors gets stuck you'll soon know about it.

» [PC] You can't buy a new park until you manage to sell your current one, and that means the nail-biting auctions where you hope your years of hard work have paid off.

» [PC] There isn't a *Theme Park* player in the world who wasn't accused of 'bad park planning'…

» [PC] Managing stock levels was the main challenge. Do yourself a favour and research bigger warehouses very early on.

AT A TIME WHEN BULLFROG WAS ALREADY MAKING A NAME FOR ITSELF AS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE DEVELOPERS IN THE INDUSTRY, THEME PARK CAME AROUND TO PROVE THAT SIMULATIONS COULD BE MORE REALISTIC, MORE HUMAN AND MORE FUN. WE SPEAK TO DEMIS HASSABIS ABOUT LITTLE PEOPLE, SALTY CHIPS AND BUILDING AN AMUSEMENT PARK SIMULATION

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BULLFROG
- **DEVELOPER:** BULLFROG
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PLATFORM:** DOS, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** BUSINESS SIMULATION

When a developer – and not its games – can be described as 'classic', that's when you know you've managed to build something special. Bullfrog Productions is a beloved name and not only among us retro gaming enthusiasts: it's a studio whose creativity, novelty and oh-so-British approach to humour will forever live on aside the very best that gaming has and will ever have to offer. And what's interesting is the variety on show: there's a 'favourite' Bullfrog game for everyone, from the RTS of *Populous* or the dark future of *Syndicate* to its comedic god games *Dungeon Keeper* or *Theme Hospital*. Yet while its earliest foray into business games didn't start with *Theme Park*, it was this addition to the company's portfolio that really set it on the road for superstardom.

"I was pretty young at the time. I started working at Bullfrog when I was 16, and was immediately working on *Theme Park* actually," says Demis Hassabis, the brain behind *Theme Park* and the simulation that powered it. Demis had already done a couple of summer internships at the Guildford-based studio, where he had done some level designing on *Syndicate* and AI programming for *Populous II*. Considered to be something of a child prodigy, Demis had two main passions: chess and playing and programming videogames. While he had been playing chess internationally, it was ultimately his curiosity about artificial intelligence within gaming that has since gone on to be the defining part of his career. That all began in earnest with *Theme Park*. "Funnily enough I wasn't sure I wanted to work on it," he laughs, "because I was keen to make a game like *Syndicate*, *Populous*, *Powermonger* and the other sort of earlier games. I was more keen to do that kind of game, maybe a strategy game."

> "I STARTED WORKING AT BULLFROG WHEN I WAS 16, AND WAS IMMEDIATELY WORKING ON THEME PARK ACTUALLY"
> DEMIS HASSABIS

The concept itself was from the mind of Peter Molyneux, who explained that it was to be "sort of a simulation, sandbox, building game", revolving around the management, growth and success of an amusement park. "I started to think about the possibilities of that and what would be needed for the AI, the simulations and that's what I ended up leading on when I was programming. And then I suddenly realised that this would almost be a new genre of game in some ways, and that theme parks would be a really fun setting – I mean who doesn't love theme parks?" This was the thing that excited Demis about the game, and ultimately led to him getting really sucked into "the technical challenges of making the simulation as realistic as possible and come to life".

But Demis started on the project basically at the beginning, and there wasn't really much else but that initial concept to build on. There was an early prototype that Peter had begun working on with placeholder graphics, no AI, no simulation and certainly no game – it was really down to Demis to guide precisely how this intriguing idea would work. "There was no blueprint for doing this," says Demis. "The first thing I wrote was the people's behaviour, the navigation; the practical things. But the fun part was the simulation."

What was interesting about *Theme Park* was that while there had been business simulation games earlier – most notably *SimCity* – these games were typically viewed from a larger, macro scale. Even *Transport Tycoon*, which released in the same year as *Theme Park*, was still completely removed of the presumed minutiae of managing train lines and production chains with tasks like loading cargo or hiring drivers all masked by the god's-eye perspective. But the simulation behind *Theme Park* was about the micro-level adjustments, allowing real-time,

» [PC] The humble beginnings of every new theme park features the same few rides; they may be boring, but they're iconic now.

» [PC] "Mum, dad… I'm so bored!" – This intro was too long, had awful CGI and stayed stuck in your head for days. We love it.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

POPULOUS
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

SYNDICATE
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993

THEME HOSPITAL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1997

EXPANDING THEME PARK

GOING FOR ANOTHER RIDE ON MODERN HARDWARE_

NINTENDO DS

It was a big surprise when the original *Theme Park* was ported over to Nintendo's popular dual-screen handheld. And this wasn't just a cash grab, either, a team in Japan that seriously cared about the original gave this some love and care, and this was a fully polished version that even came with StreetPass connectivity features. If you still have a DS, it's absolutely worth picking up today.

iOS

Like so many classic tycoon games lost to the annals of time, somehow *Theme Park* found itself dredged up from the past and into the smartphone era. While the new 3D engine gave it a fresh look, the heavy monetisation, lacking creativity and zero simulation functionality meant it shared none of the reasons players loved the original.

on-the-ground tweaking of individual things within your park here and there to improve your guests' happiness and ultimately grow your amusement park and its success. "That linked into every aspect of the gameplay," adds Demis, "so these little AI people, they were like finite state machines – and so that's what I used for them and that governed their behaviour. They had all these parameters that governed what they would then prefer: so how thirsty they were, how hungry, how happy. I think we had maybe a dozen parameters per person, and then you could have a maximum of a thousand or two thousand people at any one time. I think that was the maximum we could fit in memory."

This is what gave *Theme Park* its life, because these little people wandering around the carefully laid paving of your park weren't just passive robots that aimlessly found their way into randomly chosen attractions and sideshows. They could really feel like *people*, and through that the player was motivated to manipulate their behaviours to their own personal preferences and strategies. From a programming standpoint this meant understanding how people would move around amusement parks in real life and the ways in which they interacted with these elaborate, exciting venues. Of course, that meant 'research', meaning Demis and the rest of Bullfrog had day trips to the likes of Alton Towers in the UK to help them understand how this could correlate to a gameplay experience (and likely to have a bit of fun, too). "There's no point simulating those behaviours if they don't have some gameplay consequence," explains Demis. "We can't expose that to the gamer if they can't manipulate that or interact and influence it in some way, and that's when I came up with the idea for the salt on the chips and the water and those interactions." Demis adds that the "salt on the chips" is something that always comes up in conversation when someone brings up *Theme Park* to him, and those who played *Theme Park* will likely know what he means.

> "THERE WOULD BE THE ODD INTERN BUT WE WERE MOSTLY DOING THE TESTING OURSELVES"
> DEMIS HASSABIS

Every stall came with its own set of adjustable metrics, and through that the simulation was given its interactive believability, the more memorable example being the fact that players could increase the saltiness of the fries stall, which would in turn make the guests of the park more thirsty. Through that the player has created higher demand for drinks, and by placing a drinks stall nearby can heavily increase the cost of the fizzy drinks and even reduce the amount sold by increasing the amount of ice in each drink. While that was part of managing the business' economy, it highlighted how tweaking these many different parameters would alter the way the little people interacted with the park. "That's what brings the richness of the gameplay," says Demis. "People just couldn't believe that there could be that level of

» [PC] The end of year awards typically appeared suddenly, but they were a welcome break to see just how well you were performing.

» [PC] It wasn't until players had put some time into the game that they started to teach themselves about what each thought bubble represented.

» [PC] The excitement the first time you unlocked a new ride hasn't really been matched in the theme park tycoon genre since.

» [PlayStation] The ability to wander around your park on PlayStation is crude by modern standards, but at the time it was a really cool innovation.

CONVERSION CAPERS

PC

While there are a few issues or disadvantages with the original release that later ports were able to address in a more effective way, this was still the one to beat. Slower PCs would struggle on bigger parks crammed with guests, but otherwise it looked great, played great and was robust.

APPLE MAC

Everything just feels a little *off* with the Mac version: it's missing a few overlooked features – such as the wider view of the park – a missing right-click means just a little extra work and there's even a typo in "Firewroks Display". Sure, it's still the same hugely playable game, just slightly inferior.

AMIGA

As far as *Theme Park* ports go, the Amiga version is pretty unique without any other port like it. It has unique graphics, its research is doled out in a different order and each year ends much quicker. It still retains the classic gameplay within its hardware limitations, but suffers from slowdown.

3DO

In nearly every way possible, the 3DO version of *Theme Park* was identical to the PS1 version, but predated the PlayStation version by a year. While there's no doubt that the latter was more successful, it is just a transfer of the design and functionality of the earlier 3DO version.

MEGA DRIVE

Compared to many of its stablemates, the Mega Drive version at least had some functionalities that the others didn't. It was quicker and felt more active, but even things like being able to choose where the entrance and exit of a ride went made a big difference to the overall playability.

SNES

In the console war of the Mega Drive and the SNES, this time around it was Nintendo's console that missed out. The graphics were the same, but very slight feature improvements on the Mega Drive version meant that it was ultimately the winner in this generational battle for supremacy.

interaction. Obviously all it did would change some number in the background simulation, but it would have a visible gameplay influence that you could then optimise as a player."

After this realisation, Demis spent about six months building the simulation of the game and then the next six months building all the gameplay interfaces and the 'tuning knobs' that would allow the player through its interface to dial the buttons of the simulation. What this really meant was a heck of a lot of testing and balancing, an added challenge at a time when such departments were not quite as refined as they are these days. "You're trying to make it feel to the player like it is plausible, that these people are behaving in plausible ways and the theme park as a whole is behaving like a plausible theme park," adds Demis, alluding to the numerous micro changes that needed to be made when balancing the game so it would *feel* right.

"As you can imagine, we're working on quite slow computers, we don't really have many testers around," recalls Demis. "There would be the odd intern but we were mostly doing the testing ourselves. In the daytime I would be programming and in the night-time I would be playing it for a couple of hours, and then trying to fix the parameters. Maybe they're getting thirsty too quickly or they get too excited about certain rides or things like that." Demis points to the "massive spreadsheets of numbers" that he'd have to analyse often late at night, balancing them in ways that he hoped would work and retesting it all over again. "You can imagine that there was something like 1,000+ numbers in that database, and you run the game for a couple of hours and you see that there are too many people coming into the theme park or it's too easy or there's something not looking quite right like too many of them are getting sick or something like that, and then you try and tweak a number to change that."

But this obviously came with its own set of frustrations, which Demis equates to the simulation

» [PC] A lot of the micromanagement of your shops is where you could min-max the profit margin, but if you paid close attention to the sideshow stalls then you could rake it in.

game equivalent of the butterfly effect. "The whole point of a simulation is that if you as a player tweak something, that might change the whole outcome of the simulation. So it was really quite a challenge to try to hold all those numbers in mind, and then almost do a thought experiment in your mind of like, 'If I change the saltiness number, what things is that going to effect and do I have to change anything downstream from that?' And then they all interact with each other, and obviously that was the whole point of the simulation, that there would be an interlocking set of behaviours going on. Trying to balance that whilst you're programming was quite a challenge. A very interesting one, but quite a big challenge."

Demis was also in charge of handling the AI opponents and the rising and falling stock market that added to *Theme Park*'s economic depth. Initially this also came with a fun feature, an opportunity to visit the parks that these AI opponents were building behind the scenes. "I wrote all the AI players and they would actually build theme parks in memory and for a while we had an in-house debugging tool where you could visit their theme park and they would have their park all laid out," says Demis. That in itself would have been a quirky – albeit functionally useless – addition to the already complex simulation, but the idea itself had legs. "And then we thought: why not allow multiple players to play it and maybe you could send some troublesome thugs over to one and if your security wasn't good enough then they would

» [PC] We know you can hear it, the thumping heartbeat that Bullfrog added to soundtrack these tense, back-and-forth negotiations…

» [PC] …and the costly drawback if you were just a little too stingy to your hardworking employees.

» [PC] It was tempting to throw all your money into new rides, but the real winner is the increased warehouse stock for your food stalls.

PORTING A PARK_

FM TOWNS

Theme Park took off in Japan, and for that reason a special version was made for the FM Towns home computer – one of the more familiar brands of PC over in Japan. It was largely the same as its contemporary equivalents except for the language, but that likely helped to drive sales further.

MEGA-CD

While there was opportunity for the Mega-CD to at least stretch itself a little bit, this Domark-handled and Acclaim-distributed port was identical to the Mega Drive equivalent. Sega's disc add-on had its problems, but this port could've brought something more to the platform.

JAGUAR

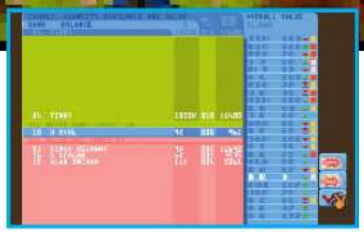
The core gameplay of the Jaguar version does make it over from the DOS version and in that sense it retains the very best of the game. But it was distributed on a cartridge, and through that there are limitations: no FMV videos and all the other limitations that come with the choice of media.

SATURN

Another of the later generation home console versions, this time releasing alongside the PlayStation version. Being a port of a simpler program on DOS meant that there wasn't likely to be much disparity between Sega and Sony's consoles. It's a strong port, but Sony's console has the edge.

PLAYSTATION

The PS1 had one trick up its sleeve. The 32-bit versions of *Theme Park* all had the same design, look, play and functionality but the PS1 had something the others didn't. The option to walk around your park in 3D, however rudimentary and even creepy it may be by modern standards, was a huge novelty at the time.



» [PC] An entire stock market system was designed, built and implemented into the game, and those savvy enough to pay heed to it could score a jackpot…

» [PC] …and you'd be awarded with this cheery FMV if you bought all of the shares in any given park.

mess up your theme park. These kinds of things we were thinking about."

Sadly this was at a time when internet connectivity was not quite as pervasive as it would soon go on to become by the end of the Nineties, and therefore not quite as huge a selling point as it might first sound. "In the end it didn't feel like it was core enough to the gameplay to be worth the effort," admits Demis. "There were a lot of technical challenges with that and, at the time, almost nobody was playing multiplayer online. If you were going to play a multiplayer game then it was over a LAN. But actually, in terms of driving sales, there wasn't very much practical use for that. So it ended up getting dropped."

> "WITH THESE TYPES OF GAMES, YOU'RE BRINGING THE PLAYER IN AS A KEY CREATIVE COMPONENT"
> DEMIS HASSABIS

This was just part of the studio's attitude towards creativity and innovation. Demis mentions how Bullfrog was a real "melting point" of talent with so many people from such a broad range of experience, but they were each skilled in their own field and, as such, there were a lot of instances of this sort of experimental development taking place, not only with *Theme Park* but throughout the company. One example involves Disney's *Coaster*, a 1993 curio that really only functioned as a 3D coaster designer with very little in the way of gameplay. "Peter and I hacked the save game of that one night, and we exported the roller-coasters that you could design in *Theme Park* in the same file format as the one that the little Disney game was using. So you could actually design your roller-coaster but then ride on it in a 3D engine. There used to be a lot of crazy little fun things like that that never made it into the game."

It wasn't all fun and games, of course, since there were pressures from various avenues. It was hard work, admits Demis, with working in the day and testing in the night a necessity when the teams were so limited in size. "It did allow you to be super creative," he adds, "because it meant you could think of an idea that morning, start coding on it that night and maybe implement it by the end of the week. You wouldn't have to go through armies of production

QUICK TRAVEL!
■ You can place multiple entrances and exits on rides like the rubber tubing or the car ride, meaning they can be used to travel around the park. Way more fun than a monorail.
RENEW RIDES!
■ As rides age, the frequency that they need to be maintained increases. Consider replacing older rides with new equivalents to avoid overworking your mechanics.
PLACE SIGNPOSTS!
■ These are essential for guiding your guests to food, drink and all the best rides since following signs makes the little people happier.
BUY BALLOONS!
■ Everyone loves a balloon, and so do your guests. Place a Balloon World store at the very start of your park for increased happiness throughout their stay.

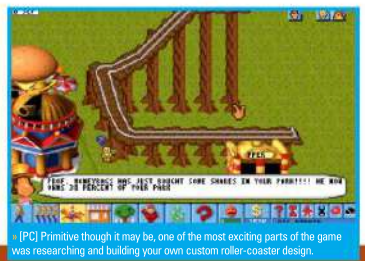
HOW TO BUILD THE PERFECT PARK

THESE USEFUL TIPS WILL MAKE THE CASH FLOW

people or other things." While this was empowering for creativity, the true ingenuity came from having to optimise *Theme Park* around the mix of machines it was set to release on. "This had to run on 486s and early Pentiums. It had almost no memory and the processing speed was slow." Like so many developers at the time, it was a constant battle to get more and more out of the hardware, except Demis was trying to build a rich and deep simulation, too. "This is bringing back good memories," he says, "because I remember you were told by the graphics engine people, 'OK, this is how many milliseconds you've got for your AI logic before the next frame is drawn and you cannot be any more time than that because the graphics engine needs the rest of the time.' And so you actually had to fit in your game loop cycle within those frames, so you had a budget basically. You can have ten out of fifty frames of refresh to do the AI logic."

Despite Demis' young age, when *Theme Park* released in 1994 it was seen as a standout achievement. As the little people wandered around your park, thinking critical thoughts about the state of your pavement's litter, the high profit you're making or the desire to just please find the damn exit, it was a revelation for gamers across the globe. Business simulation games might not have started with *Theme Park*, but it certainly set the foundation for creating something that was fun and entertaining, yet rich and deep – a truly living system that was affected by the decisions and actions of the player. It was unique in its gameplay, but also its style and tone – and this combined had an effect on the popularity of the game. "*Theme Park* appealed to a lot of female players and older players," adds Demis, "and *Theme Park* was an early example of appealing to that crowd that at the time no one really knew existed because they weren't the gamer demographic. But it was obviously there, if you wrote the right kind of game."

The reason, as Demis suggests, is because *Theme Park* is a game that offers something to gamers that is more than the typical violent or competitive notion of gaming. "I used to think about that a lot in the few years afterwards, and I think one of the reasons was that *Theme Park* by its nature was a very constructive game. Most games that I had worked on or that I had seen or played where you're trying to win, and here was a game about expression of creativity, about design, about construction." These days that doesn't seem so unusual, perhaps; there's a game for all tastes. But at the time there wasn't really anything like *Theme Park*, at least not with that level of intricacy and believability. But that's not why Demis thinks it has become a cold, hard classic, "With these types of games, you're bringing the player in as a key creative component. They're creating their own unique stories using the tools that you've given them. With *Theme Park*, that meant that every single person you spoke to told you about a different aspect of it that struck a chord with them."



[PC] Primitive though it may be, one of the most exciting parts of the game was researching and building your own custom roller-coaster design.

CLEANING DUTY!
■ It's good to set specific routes for your handyman – particularly near food stalls and vomit-inducing rides – to ensure these trash hot spots are quickly dealt with.

STOCK UP!
■ Certain stores are better for combating the needs of your little people, but this means stocks dwindle quicker – constantly check on stock levels and order in time.

LEAD THE WAY!
■ Place your most exciting rides at the edges of your park to have the little people wander through the carefully constructed labyrinth of attractions, (profitable) sideshows and stores.

DOUBLE UP!
■ Don't be afraid to build two or even three of the game's most exciting rides. While variety is essential, guests will gladly double dip on these ones.

BRANCHING PARK!
■ Try to use your ride exits to guide the little people away from a central broadway and to different areas of the park, thus reducing congestion.

BE UNSTUCK!
■ Don't worry, it's not 'bad planning' that's to blame, but stupid little people going where they shouldn't. Find stuck guests near exits of rides, trapped behind fences or in the inaccessible spaces within your car ride or rubber tubing,

Hardware Heaven

Nomad

» **MANUFACTURER:** Sega » **YEAR:** 1995
» **COST:** £229.99 (launch), £216+ (today, boxed), £130+ (today, unboxed)

Approaching the mid-Nineties, Sega designed an ambitious new console to solve the problem of having two declining platforms in the market. Code-named Venus, this handheld would succeed the Game Gear, while retaining its design principle of leveraging existing home hardware. But rather than being a reworked version of the Mega Drive, as the Game Gear had been based on the Master System, this console would simply be a Mega Drive – compatible with existing software, and even certain peripherals. It could even output to a TV. The console would therefore launch with a library of hundreds of games and enjoy a considerable technological advantage over other handhelds.

The Nomad, to give it its final name, was similar to the Game Gear in many ways – it was rather chunky, especially with a large cartridge and bulky detachable battery compartment protruding from the system. Its LCD screen was similarly not great in motion thanks to a ghosting effect, and once again, that backlight for the screen made it very battery hungry. The high initial price didn't help, but even a $100 price drop didn't make the Nomad sell amazingly well, ensuring that it became prized by collectors in the years that followed. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME
Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine

Every handheld console needs a great puzzle game to go with it, and normally we'd pick *Puyo Puyo 2* for the Mega Drive. However, since we need to stick to North American releases for an unmodified console, this rebranded version of the classic competitive game is the one to go for. Since all of the gameplay takes place on a single screen, the ghosting problems of the stock LCD screen are minimised, and the password feature added to this game allows you to power off and resume a session later – crucial on any handheld, but especially one with limited battery life.

Nomad fact

■ The Nomad was released solely in the North American market, and the console identifies as an American machine for cartridges that contain region locking software.

PROCESSORS: MOTOROLA 68000 16-BIT CPU (7.67 MHZ), ZILOG Z80 8-BIT CPU (3.58 MHZ)

RAM: 64KB MAIN MEMORY, 64KB VIDEO MEMORY, 8KB AUDIO MEMORY

GRAPHICS: SEGA/YAMAHA YM7101 VDP, UP TO 320X480 DISPLAY (320X224 TYPICAL), 64 COLOURS FROM A PALETTE OF 512, 80 SPRITES ON SCREEN

AUDIO: YAMAHA YM2612 SOUND CHIP, SIX FM SYNTHESIS CHANNELS, PLUS TEXAS INSTRUMENTS SN76489 FOUR CHANNEL PSG

MEDIA: MEGA DRIVE ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 32 MEGABIT)

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

MEGA-CD GAMES

The Mega Drive's CD-ROM add-on may not have been a huge success but in its short life it still enjoyed a small selection of excellent exclusives and enhanced ports that make it highly collectible with Sega fans today

Words by Ashley Day

GOTTA GO PAST

SONIC CD

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1993

While Yuji Naka was over in the US developing *Sonic 2* for Mega Drive, co-creator Naoto Ohshima remained in Japan and worked on an altogether different *Sonic* sequel; one powered by the exciting new potential of CD-ROM. *Sonic CD* was packed to the brim with content, including a gorgeous cartoon quality intro movie, a jaw-dropping bonus stage that used sprite-scaling effects to simulate 3D and, most importantly, three different versions of every stage. By speeding through gates marked past, present or future, Sonic could travel to vastly different versions of each zone, giving players a richer environment to explore, and more reasons to replay.

With its hidden depths and slick gameplay, *Sonic CD* is a fantastic, somewhat underrated *Sonic* game. If you own a Mega-CD then it should absolutely be in your collection. Thankfully, it's not too difficult to find and tends to go for a fair price. If you want a bargain US copy then search for the 'Not for resale' version, which was bundled with hardware and can be found for about half the price.

FAST FORWARD

The Music of Sonic CD

The biggest decision to make about *Sonic CD* is not whether to buy it (you should) but which version to get. The US release has a completely different soundtrack to the European and Japanese editions. The former has a more traditional platform game soundtrack for the era, whereas the original Japanese score feels unmistakably Sonic Team and takes advantage of the CD format with multiple layers and voice samples. Debate rages to this day about which soundtrack is the best, but if you prefer the US tracks then it's important to know that you are very, very wrong.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ USA

» [Mega-CD] There's no Tails or Knuckles in *Sonic CD* but you can thank this game for introducing Amy Rose.

PRICING STRATEGY

SHINING FORCE CD

EXPECT TO PAY £150+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £220+ USA

DEVELOPER: SONIC! SOFTWARE PLANNING
RELEASE: 1994

If you're a fan of Sega's strategy RPG series then *Shining Force CD* is an essential purchase packed full of tactical goodness. Sonic! Software Planning not only included 16-bit remakes of the first two Game Gear titles on the disc but also added two exclusive bonus scenarios with their own story and battles. Since the first Game Gear title was never released outside of Japan, this is the only official way to play in English and makes the collection even more valuable.

Shining Force CD is a pricey prospect and it only gets more expensive if you want to carry your save data across from one scenario to the next. There isn't enough room to hold all the saves on the Mega-CD's internal memory, so dedicated tacticians will also need to invest in a Backup RAM Cart.

» [Mega-CD] *Shining Force CD*'s remade graphics look so much better than the Game Gear originals.

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ JAPAN

» [Mega-CD] Sadly, the third Game Gear game wasn't included in the Mega-CD remake and remains a Japanese exclusive.

PURSE SNATCHER

SNATCHER

EXPECT TO PAY £900+ USA

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
RELEASE: 1994

There have been many versions of Hideo Kojima's cult cyberpunk classic over the years, but if you want to play this text heavy adventure in English then the Mega-CD version remains the only official way to play. As the game's reputation has increased in the post-*Metal Gear Solid* era, the asking price just keeps going up and up, making *Snatcher* the preserve of hardcore Mega-CD collectors and Kojima obsessives. But if you can afford it then know that you're in for a good time. The story is great fun, the visuals and sound layer on the atmosphere and the game is liberally peppered with those subversive little details that define Kojima's work. You can even plug in the *Lethal Enforcers* Justifier lightgun to make the shooting sections more fun.

EXPECT TO PAY £550+ EUROPE

» [Mega-CD] The voice acting in *Snatcher* is uncommonly good for the era.

[Mega-CD] Some elements were censored compared to the Japanese original but *Snatcher* still has a very adult tone.

MEGA SEEDY

NIGHT TRAP

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ USA

DEVELOPER: DIGITAL PICTURES
RELEASE: 1992

Live action FMV games were a defining part of the early Nineties CD-ROM boom and though the genre is commonly derided, *Night Trap* does have its fans and is easily the most iconic game of its type. With its cheesy acting and over-the-top booby-trap scenes, this interactive movie, about teens trapped in a house of horrors, can be good fun to play. If you hang up your preconceptions about how a game *should* play and just enjoy the show, you might discover its hidden charms.

Love them or loathe them, FMV games were a staple part of the Mega-CD's library, so can you really consider your collection complete without one? Thankfully, *Night Trap* is pretty easy to get hold of and won't break the bank. But if you do have a bit more cash to spare, and own the 32X add-on, then you might consider the Mega-CD 32X version, which plays the same but with much nicer video quality.

EXPECT TO PAY £4+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE

» [Mega-CD] Look, we know *Night Trap* is considered a joke but just play it before you judge. You might like it.

» [Mega-CD] It takes some skill to survive to the end of *Night Trap*, but you'll see some silly scenes along the way.

AT THE B-MOVIES

More FMV games, if you must…

Double Switch

This follow-up to *Night Trap* also sees you protect a house full of people by monitoring video feeds and springing traps. This time, the baddies appear randomly rather than at set times, and there's a higher calibre of actors, including Debbie Harry, Corey Haim and R Lee Ermey.

Ground Zero: Texas

Since it combines the camera-switching mechanics of *Night Trap* and *Double Switch* with the shooting gallery gameplay of *Mad Dog McCree*, you might say that *Ground Zero: Texas* is the ultimate FMV game. But you might say a lot of things…

The Masked Rider: Kamen Rider Zo

Created by Toei Video and based on the 1993 *Kamen Rider Zo* film, this interactive movie is a rather schlocky treat for fans of goofy Tokusatsu shows and the unlikely US release even features bad dubbing for extra authenticity.

COLLECTING TIPS!

Make space
■ The Mega-CD has a limited amount of internal memory, but if you're going to play a lot of games you'll need the extra space of the Backup RAM Cart.

Import away
■ Japanese Mega-CD games tend to be cheaper, and there are plenty of regional exclusives too. Get the Pro CDX converter cart so you can play everything.

Cool people buy the Mega-CD 1
■ There are quite a few models of Mega-CD hardware to choose from. The Discman-like Multimega is a particular favourite, but the classic hi-fi style Mega-CD 1 is still the best.

Limited Run Games
■ A few Mega-CD games, like *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Night Trap* have enjoyed modern releases via Limited Run Games, including some really nice special editions.

MOON ON A STICK

LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

DEVELOPER: GAME ARTS
RELEASE: 1992

EXPECT TO PAY £100+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £12+ JAPAN

■ *Lunar* has been remade on three separate occasions, so if you really want to play it there are plenty of options. But there's still something to be said for experiencing this game as it was originally intended. To play it now is to travel back in time to when CD technology was the height of excitement; the standard RPG template boosted with anime cinematics, CD audio and voice acting to achieve a level of presentation that just wasn't possible on standard cartridge-based systems.

If you don't speak Japanese, it'll cost you a lot more money to experience *Lunar* but at least the US release has that beautiful box, complete with foil stamped text.

» [Mega-CD] *Lunar* is a fairly traditional JRPG, but the CD presentation makes it feel a little more special.

» [Mega-CD] The characters in *Lunar* were designed by Toshiyuki Kubooka, who also designed characters for *Giant Robo*.

LUNAR 2: ETERNAL BLUE

What to expect from Lunar's Mega-CD sequel

If you enjoy *Lunar: The Silver Star* then you'll definitely want to play the sequel, *Lunar: Eternal Blue*, which offers more of the same, only bigger and better. It boasts more impressive graphics, longer cinematics and even more voice acting. Be aware that the Mega-CD version tends to go for about double the price of the first game and features a divisive Working Designs change that required players to spend magic points in order to save. The PlayStation remake dropped this controversial change, so you might prefer that version instead.

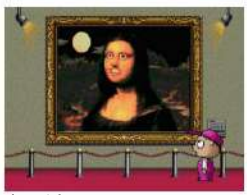
CHANNEL HOPPING MAD

PANIC!

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £75+ USA

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1993



» [Mega-CD] You want something really weird and unique for your Mega-CD? Panic! is for you.

■ If you want something a little bit different for your Mega-CD then look no further than *Panic!* (also known as *Switch* in Japan). One of those experimental games that attempted to do something original with the CD technology, it largely failed and was panned by critics, but there's no denying there's nothing else quite like it. Playing the role of Slap, and his dog Stick, you have to travel through a series of bizarre screens by pressing buttons to navigate a virtual labyrinth and deliver an antidote to the core of a virus-riddled computer. Each stage places Slap inside a bizarre multimedia screen and asks him to press one of a number of buttons to see what happens next. One might just transition you to the next screen while others may trigger a weird animation or booby-trap. There's not much of a game there to be honest, but as a relic of the CD-ROM age it's a real novelty piece.

MECHA CD

ROBO ALESTE

EXPECT TO PAY £75+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £80+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: COMPILE
RELEASE: 1992

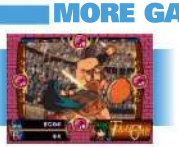
» [Mega-CD] A sequel to *Robo Aleste* was planned, with some cool character designs printed in Japan's *Beep! Mega Drive* magazine in 1993 but it was eventually cancelled.

■ While Compile's *Aleste* series of shooters traditionally see you pilot a spaceship, *Robo Aleste* follows on from Mega Drive's Musha Aleste, putting you in the cockpit of a samurai-themed giant robot in feudal Japan. The theme breathes new life into the usual *Aleste* formula and gives *Robo Aleste* a distinct feel that makes it one of the most memorable shooters on Mega-CD. It's particularly good fun to take in the little details like the burning farms and villages below or the tiny ninjas who fly through the air attached to little kites.

Robo Aleste is one of a handful of titles that wasn't included on M2's recent *Aleste Collection* and has never been reissued elsewhere, so if you'd like to own a copy then Mega-CD is the sole option. It's getting pricey now but if it continues to remain Mega-CD exclusive, expect the asking price to keep rising.

EXPECT TO PAY £110+ USA

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER



TIME GAL

DEVELOPER: WOLF TEAM
RELEASED: 1992
EXPECT TO PAY:
JAPAN: **£32+**, EUROPE: **£35+**, US: **£60+**

SOL-FEACE

DEVELOPER: WOLF TEAM
RELEASED: 1991
EXPECT TO PAY:
JAPAN: **£20+**, EUROPE: **£3+**, US: **£5+**

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VS THE KINGPIN

DEVELOPER: MONKEY BUSINESS
RELEASED: 1993
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE: **£47+**, US: **£40+**

LORDS OF THUNDER

DEVELOPER: ELEVEN
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY:
EUROPE: **£390+**, US: **£225+**

THE NINJA WARRIORS

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASED: 1993
EXPECT TO PAY:
JAPAN: **£75+**

ONE CAREFUL DRIVER

ROAD AVENGER

EXPECT TO PAY £3+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £12+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER:	WOLF TEAM
RELEASE:	1992

■ Of all the games that *Dragon's Lair* influenced, Data East's *Road Avenger* is one of the coolest. Rather than use the interactive cartoon format to put you in control of a hero, it placed you behind the wheel of a sports car on an octane-fuelled rampage. Feeling like a cross between *Out Run* and *Mad Max*, its master stroke is that the first-person perspective creates a sense of speed and excitement as you avoid other murderous drivers or smash through crowds of shoppers.

» [Mega-CD] Trust us, *Road Avenger* is a cut above most Laserdisc games.

This is a Laserdisc game with a Japanese anime sensibility and in 1992 it delivered thrills that you could only imagine on other systems. Like other Laserdisc ports, the Mega-CD version sadly features a grainier video quality but when you can pick it up so cheaply, who can complain?

POSTAL ORDER

POPFUL MAIL

EXPECT TO PAY £250+ USA

DEVELOPER:	NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE:	1994

» [Mega-CD] Exploring the world of *Popful Mail* holds similar pleasures to Westone's *Monster World IV*. Consider it one of the system's best games.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ JAPAN

■ Taking a break from action RPGs like *Ys* and *Dragon Slayer*, Nihon Falcom put its dungeon crawling, boss battling skills to great use in the platform adventure genre when it made *Popful Mail* for PC-88 in 1991. A few years later, Sega asked the studio to remake the game for Mega-CD as a *Sonic The Hedgehog* spin-off called *Sister Sonic*. Somewhere along the way these strange plans fell through and a remake of the original game made its way to CD, complete with (yes, you guessed it!) anime cinematics and voice acting. The US release features the typical Working Design changes – cheesy jokes and unnecessary difficulty increases – and it happens to be very expensive. Get the much cheaper Japanese release and you'll miss some of the story, but the quality platforming and exploration will shine through.

MIKE HAGGLE

FINAL FIGHT CD

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA

DEVELOPER:	CAPCOM
RELEASE:	1993

■ While the Super Nintendo port of *Final Fight* was famously compromised, with no multiplayer mode, a missing stage, and one whole character gone, Sega fans eventually got the real deal with *Final Fight CD*. Although it's not quite arcade perfect, this was the best version of the brawler you could hope to buy outside Japan and boasted all the features missing from the SNES conversion, complete with a new, arranged CD soundtrack.

If you're after a superior version of *Final Fight* there are more viable options available these days. The arcade version has appeared in plenty of modern compilations, and the GBA port is pretty nifty too. But if you're looking to bulk out your Mega-CD collection with some classic arcade action, then *Final Fight CD* is one of the best.

» [Mega-CD] *Final Fight* was an excellent conversion, easily highlighting the strengths of Sega's system.

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ JAPAN

FIGHT ON...

More beat-'em-ups on Mega-CD

Sengoku Denshou

SNK's samurai-western brawler is hardly the best beat-'em-up ever made and, unfortunately, the Mega-CD port falls short of the Neo Geo version with choppy animation and a missing two-player mode. Pick up the Japan exclusive release only if you're going for a full collection or if you really love the genre.

Sega Classics Arcade Collection

This compilation CD is a cheap and easy way to get some decent Sega games on the Mega-CD and includes two fantastic beat-'em-ups: *Golden Axe* and *Streets Of Rage*. Functionally, the games are identical to the Mega Drive versions but *Golden Axe* is enhanced with the arcade soundtrack.

KEIO FLYING SQUADRON

DEVELOPER:	VICTOR
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY:

JAPAN: **£100+**, EUROPE: **£110+**, US: £**1450+**

VAY

DEVELOPER:	SIMS
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY:

JAPAN: **£15+**, US: **£55+**

ANDROID ASSAULT: REVENGE OF BARI-ARM

DEVELOPER:	HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASED:	1993

EXPECT TO PAY:

JAPAN: **£80+**, US: **£180+**

FATAL FURY SPECIAL

DEVELOPER:	FUNCOM
RELEASED:	1995

EXPECT TO PAY:

JAPAN: **£30+**, EUROPE: **£300+**, US: **£360+**

MARKY MARK: MAKE MY VIDEO

DEVELOPER:	DIGITAL PICTURES
RELEASED:	1992

EXPECT TO PAY:

US: **£20+**

Mortal Kombat II

"YOU WANT A FAIR FIGHT? DREAM ON"

» ARCADE » 1993 » MIDWAY

I've been working on Retro Gamer for a while now, and I'm starting to fondly reminisce about my early days in the office. One of the big things that jumps out to me is being caught abusing the vulnerabilities of the CPU opponents when playing *Mortal Kombat II*, and having my colleagues chastise me for it. But honestly, I felt forced into it. The game's difficulty is the only thing that rivals its fatalities for over-the-top brutality, and it was actually one of my first experiences of how ruthlessly hard some arcade games could be.

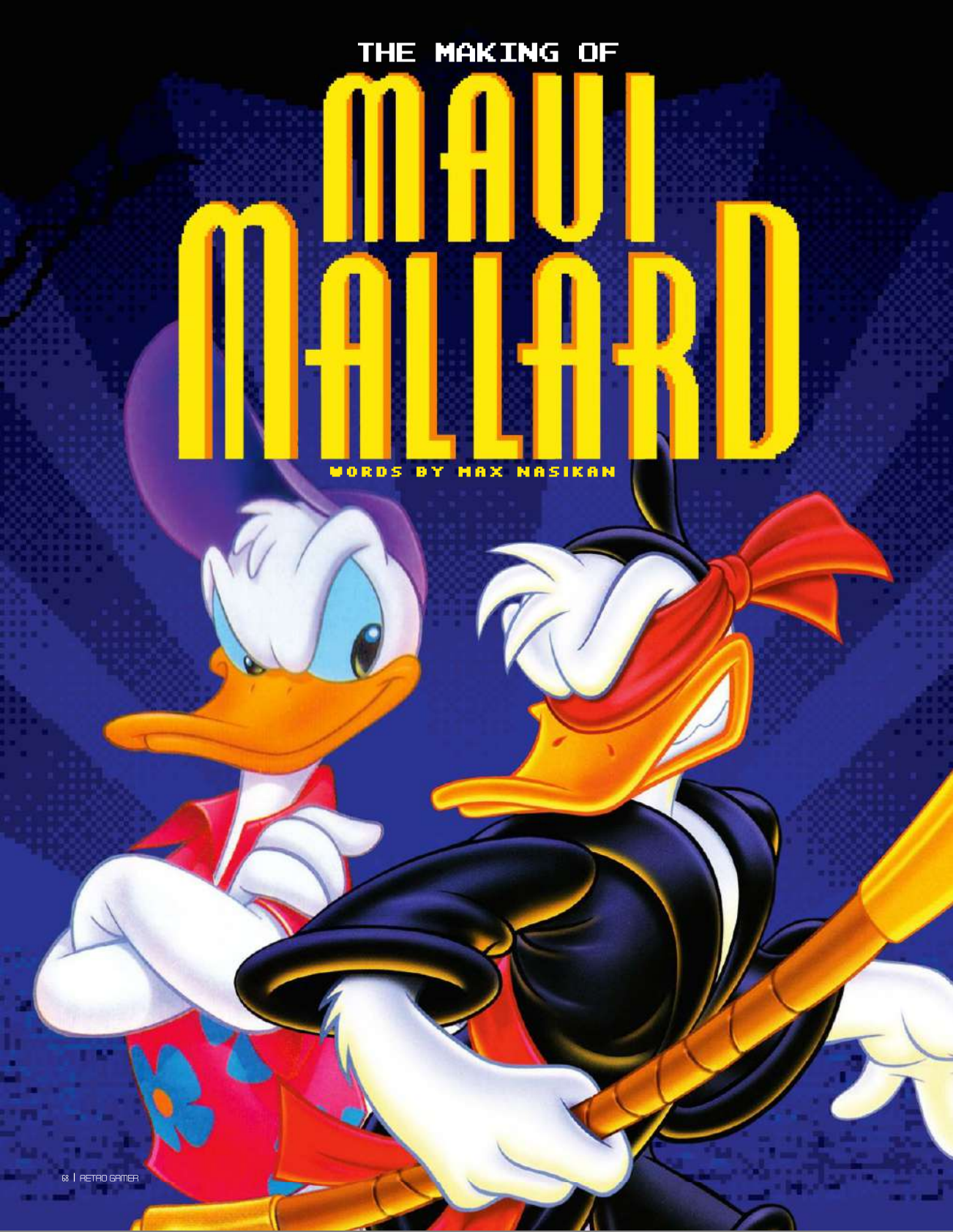
My first encounter with this most merciless of challenges came on a family holiday, in a tiny arcade at a caravan park – one mostly filled with coin pushers, with a couple of videogames at the back. My dad actually already owned *Mortal Kombat II* for the Mega Drive, so we were both familiar with the game and knew all the moves we'd need, and we approached the machine with a rather misplaced sense of confidence. No amount of prior knowledge was going to stop us from being positively pulverised by even the early opponents, as their programming was a world apart from that of the comparatively soft Mega Drive combatants.

We managed to get past the first few fighters after a while, but Johnny Cage was a different story. We couldn't even get near him thanks to his projectiles, which have an unusual arcing trajectory and can be fired both high and low. Jumping in didn't work, projectiles didn't cancel one another out, and his attack was relentless to the point that walking forward and blocking wasn't viable either. We walked away with our virtual backs broken, truly humbled.

Try as we might, we could never replicate that same deadly strategy and years later, I learned why – the CPU just cheats. While it does make a vague effort to look like it's playing fair, it can break the rules in many ways, including throwing projectiles faster than players are allowed to. So there's your lesson, kids – if you want to win, just rig the rules in your favour.

THE MAKING OF MAUI MALLARD

WORDS BY MAX NASIKAN



CRAIG ALLEN

» Craig worked as an associate producer on *Maui Mallard*.

JOHN FIORITO

» Lead artist duties on *Maui Mallard* were carried out by John.

PATRICK GILMORE

» Patrick worked as the senior producer on *Maui Mallard*.

DISNEY INTERACTIVE'S DEBUT PROJECT, MAUI MALLARD WAS CREATED BY A US STUDIO, BUT THE ORIGINAL GAME NEVER RECEIVED A RELEASE THERE. EVEN NOW, THE FATE OF THIS GAME REMAINS HIDDEN BY A THICK AND COLD SHADOW. IT'S TIME TO FIND OUT HOW DONALD CHANGED A SAILOR SHIRT FOR A NINJA SUIT

Disney is not a company that kills the goose that lays the golden eggs and nowadays, many of the studio's projects from the past are gaining sequels and remakes. But once upon a time, Disney itself clipped the wings of a specific mallard, depriving US Genesis owners of a potential blockbuster in the process.

When *Aladdin* launched on Sega's 16-bit console in late 1993, its incredible sales exceeded all expectations. Realising that games can be a very profitable business, Disney decided to take matters into its own hands. This is how Disney Interactive was born, the company's first in-house game studio.

And the first brainchild of the newly minted studio was a quack detective called Maui Mallard, the spitting image of Donald Duck. "Maui was born out of a desire to create something bold with Disney characters, in a way that only Disney could," recalls senior producer Patrick Gilmore. "The idea was to take a classic character and create an all-new adventure, not just tap into nostalgia or milk past classics. We would build the game internally, with the first videogame team ever formed inside of Disney."

The original game was created for Mega Drive (Genesis in the States) and was conceived as the successor to *Quackshot*. "One of the first games I worked on at Disney was *Quackshot*," continues Patrick. "'Quackshot', of course, is a play on the phrase 'crack shot', a phrase used to describe an expert marksman. Playing around with the crack/quack rhyme, I started thinking of old pulp *Crack Detective* adventure magazines of the same era as *Indiana Jones*. So 'Crack Detective' became 'Quack Detective', and since Donald as a gumshoe was less interesting than Indiana Jones, we soon had him in a Hawaiian shirt in a kind of Magnum PI role, which seemed a much better fit."

» [Mega Drive] The stretchiness of the bungee is felt here physically: it was necessary to stretch it as long as possible for the highest takeoff.

> "IF WE DID NOT HAVE TO WORK ON IT [THE LION KING], WE COULD HAVE RELEASED MAUI MALLARD A YEAR EARLIER"
> **JOHN FIORITO**

Elements of pop culture from the early Nineties were also used, from ninja movies to bungee jumping. With zombies and a tribe of sharp-toothed Muddrakes in stock, the project turned out to be quite risky by today's Disney standards. To highlight their connection to the company, the team looked for inspiration from Disney attractions such as The Haunted Mansion and Pirates Of The Caribbean.

Like any great concept, *Maui Mallard* also borrowed a lot of ideas from its predecessors in the gaming industry. So, *Gunstar Heroes* influenced the game's weapon system, and instead of *Quackshot*'s plungers, the player's gun began to shoot bugs. Plus, a grasping staff you could swing in ninja form was added, which turned out to be similar to the same mechanics of *Earthworm Jim*. Coincidence? Almost. "I think it's fair to say that both *Maui* and *Earthworm Jim* were inspired by *The Jungle Book*," recalls Patrick, "which was created by the same team that worked with Disney on *Aladdin* and then left to form Shiny Entertainment and create *Earthworm Jim*."

The project received the green light at the end of 1993. Starting at the same time as *Earthworm Jim*, *Maui* was suddenly forced out of the race, allowing its competitor to outrun it for a full year. So the game immediately ran into the first hurdle from Disney. "Our team abandoned the project for six months to help make *The Lion King*," recalls lead artist John Fiorito. "If we did not have to work on it, we could have released *Maui Mallard* a year earlier. In retrospect, it was probably a wise financial decision to go with *The Lion King* instead of *Maui Mallard*."

Having dealt with the deadlines on the side, part of the *Maui* team was back on track, and the work continued with renewed vigour. The creators tried to diversify the gameplay in each level as much as possible. This is how a key feature of the game appeared with a split of the main character into two entities – a Hawaiian detective and a Ninja Maui, each of which was granted their own distinct mechanics. Combine that with bungee jumping,

» [Mega Drive] The unicycle roller-coaster ride makes the bonus levels so much fun.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** DISNEY INTERACTIVE, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE LION KING
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1994

TOY STORY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

BRAZILIAN MYSTERY

A RELEASE STORY THAT CONFUSED EVEN THE CREATORS OF THE GAME

In the spring of 1997, Brazilian publisher TecToy released *Maui Mallard* for its Mega Drive market. The uniqueness of the event was added by the fact that it was the first and only release of the original 16-bit game in its final form.

The gameplay in the European and Brazilian versions for Mega Drive contained dozens of differences. From hint screens after death in the first two levels to new passwords. A number of bugs were also fixed and several sprites were added that were missing in the European Mega Drive edition (for example, dust under Maui's feet). Interestingly, all these changes to the Brazilian version are completely similar to the new alterations of the PC version, which was released six months earlier.

In 2020, a unique Genesis cartridge was sold on Ebay. Similar cartridges were created via a small circulation in 1996 and went through the hands of the *Maui* team – one with the same sticker is also owned by Craig Allen. The gameplay changes in it were completely identical to those in the Mega Drive cartridge released in Brazil. Final builds of the original Genesis game (NTSC) and the Brazilian Mega Drive version were created at the same time in November 1996.

The last clue in this confusing affair was the last name's change of the associate producer. Craig officially changed it in March 1996, and the new surname is reflected only in the credits of the Brazilian Mega Drive game and the PC version, which was completed in October the same year.

Therefore, the final version of the original Genesis game was completed only after the release in Europe on Mega Drive, and later became the source for the PC release of *Maui*, and eventually came out only in Brazil. Case closed.

» This rare cartridge is from the private collection of Rafael Gutierrez

» [Mega Drive] With the teleport move in ninja mode Maui can painlessly traverse lava.

gun-recoil diving, a roller-coaster ride on a monocycle, *Sonic*-themed high-speed running and a lot of humour and you've got one of the most interesting and underrated games on Sega's console.

> "IN THE US IT WAS FELT THAT DONALD WOULD SKEW THE GAME TOO YOUNG FOR THE TARGETED GAMING AUDIENCE, [SO] IT WAS DECIDED THE FRANCHISE NAME WOULD BE COLD SHADOW"
> CRAIG ALLEN

Speaking of *Maui Mallard*, it would be a crime not to mention that it pushed the envelope in terms of hand-drawn animation in a 16-bit game. It was made by Creative Capers, which had just finished its work on *Mickey Mania*. For those who came from Don Bluth Studios and previously participated in *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, creating amazing animation for the game was not a problem at all. But this time, the animators had to face the limitations of the console itself.

"We had limits on the numbers of drawings that could be used because of file sizes. We came from feature animation so this was something we needed to learn," recalls Sue Shakespeare, the game's animation producer and president of Creative Capers. "Patrick Gilmore helped us learn the importance of 'conveying a lot - with a little' meaning achieving a lot of action with few drawings."

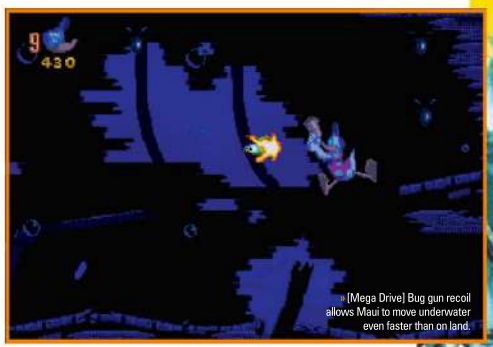
In addition, associate producer Craig Allen wanted *Maui*'s action to be very 'snappy' so he could respond quickly to game player response. "We developed a number of techniques to allow us to show a lot of action in just a few drawings," continues Sue. "One example in particular is when Maui would pull his gun. In a standard 'flowing' animation this action requires six to eight drawings. We did it in just a couple of drawings and showed multiple images in a single drawing. It felt like a smooth action, but was done very quickly."

Some of the animations were not included in the original Mega Drive game, but ended up in the SNES version, which was being created in parallel by Eurocom at the same time on the other side of the Atlantic. Likewise, some animations and even some of the original game's characters did not make it to the SNES version, even though the British studio had more options for using graphics on Nintendo's 16-bit console.

The latter is due to the fact that after the contract with Creative Capers expired, there was a need for a number of additional animations, the creation of which was delegated to the in-house animators of the *Maui* team in Burbank. At that time the interaction of the departments of the newborn company was not properly aligned, and therefore the later animations of the game, created within the walls of Disney Interactive, did not fall into the hands of the Brits at Eurocom in time. Strict memory limitations had left their mark on more

» Iconic movie poster artist Drew Struzan created this boxart for the PC version of the game.

» [Mega Drive] Disney has never been so close to Lovecraft! Cover art from one of his horror books served as a reference for this level.



» [Mega Drive] Bug gun recoil allows Maui to move underwater even faster than on land.

than just animation, though. The team compressed everything they could. As a result, out of ten originally conceived levels, only eight made it into the final game. Although The Temple Of Shabuhm Shabuhm and Luau levels were left on the cutting room floor, a monocycle-riding bonus level was assembled from their fragments at the very last minute.

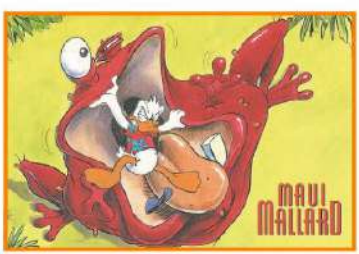
The music for *Maui Mallard* was the first full-length soundtrack by Michael Giacchino, now a well-known composer for Pixar feature films and an Oscar winner. Michael wrote the vast majority of melodies for the game, but left DI before completing the project. The rest of the tunes, as well as all the sound effects, were created by sound designer Patrick Collins, who was involved at that time on four Disney games at once. "I personally was working on *Gargoyles*, *Maui Mallard* and *Pocahontas* all simultaneously," he says. "I also did a version of the song *You've Got A Friend In Me* for the Genesis release of *Toy Story*. There was a period toward the end where I stayed up three days straight trying to finish everything to meet all the deadlines for those four games. *Maui* was the game that excited me the most."

At first, the company had high hopes for *Maui Mallard*. Negotiations were underway with Disney Television Animation about the appearance of the character in an animated series. It has even been discussed that today's Blizzard Beach at Walt Disney World could become a Maui Mallard-themed water park. By early October 1995, the final builds for Mega Drive and SNES were sent to the publishers and the *Maui* team threw a party to celebrate the completion of the project, inviting the Eurocom team to it. The creators were proud of themselves, the game was about to appear on sale and it seemed that nothing could prevent it from becoming a potential blockbuster like *Aladdin*.

However, the Christmas holidays were getting closer, and *Maui* was still not on the shelves in the States. By that time, the game had already been released under *Donald In Maui Mallard* on Mega

» Original level concept art by Kurt Dumas.

» [SNES] The ninja staff makes acrobatics varied: from grasping hooks to climbing vertical passages.



» The most caricatured boss of the game appeared on promo materials.

CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW DO THE OTHER VERSIONS OF MAUI MALLARD COMPARE?

SNES

Created by the Eurocom team, the SNES version was radically different from the original game, not only in sprites and background graphics, but also in many aspects of the gameplay. The British studio's version is essentially not a port, but their own vision of the game.

PC

The Disney Interactive team ported the Genesis version to PC, so, with the exception of improved pixel art, the only significant difference was the change in its music. We'll praise the use of Red Book CD, which made it possible to use the original high-quality midi files of the composers.

GAME BOY

Bonsai Entertainment created this rather lacklustre port in 1998 during the final days of Nintendo's handheld game console. The 8-bit limits of the Game Boy affected not only the gameplay, but also the plot – due to the lack of animations in the cutscenes it seemed as if Maui suddenly died in the finale.

Drive all over Europe, but not in its homeland. Even less fortunate was the SNES version, which was released at the end of 1995 only in Germany. What could have gone wrong?

"The game had to be done for the 1995 Christmas release," recalls Patrick Collins. "Afterwards I was told that the US release was delayed or cancelled. And I was so annoyed. I remember going to the marketers and thinking, 'What?!' And then I heard, 'Donald Duck is simply not fashionable in the US, as in Europe.' And I expressed my opinion that they were wrong, but it didn't matter."

» Early concept art of the final level by Kurt Dumas.

» Tower concept art for The Realm Of The Dead level.

Patrick Gilmore puts it this way, "At the time, Disney was not a licensed publisher for either the Genesis or Super Nintendo platforms. Up to that point, we had shipped games for PC, and had co-developed games with licensed publishers. To release a game on console, we would need to either sign Sega/Nintendo's publishing agreements, or find a partner with whom we could co-publish *Maui*. The challenge was that partners often invested because a relationship with Disney came with the promise of a sort of cultural event from a marketing standpoint – a push to relaunch a character, or to release the next big feature film. I believe there were a number of proposals, all of which required Disney to put up marketing funds, which the division wasn't funded to do. As a result, a deal never came together."

Thus, the US-coded game turned out to be a Mega Drive exclusive for European and Brazilian markets, whose advertising campaign even in Europe was close to zero. Due to rather strange marketing decisions, its fate was allowed to take its course, which was not slow to affect the modest sales. The team was overwhelmed by this decision.

"I was invited to meet with Steve McBeth, head of Disney consumer products North America, and the founding president of Disney Interactive," Patrick Gilmore continues. "He told me they had exhausted efforts to find a publishing partner who would take on some of the risk of releasing *Maui*. He said he felt it was 'a great game, a truly great game', and that the team had accomplished their goal to build an original product worthy of Disney. He said he didn't see a path to publishing it in the US, but that they would not give up on *Maui* in any territory where they found a meaningful opportunity.

> "IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO ANY OF US THAT, IN A COMPANY THE SIZE OF DISNEY, BRINGING A GREAT PRODUCT TO MARKET WOULD PRESENT A CHALLENGE"
> PATRICK GILMORE

"Our strategy has always been, 'If you build it, they will come.' We only ever worried about the game being fun. It didn't occur to any of us that, in a company the size of Disney, bringing a great product to market would present a challenge."

What could the person who was at the origins of the project feel at that moment? "For the briefest moment, I remember thinking, 'Why didn't they know this earlier?'' continues Patrick. "Almost immediately, I realised that if they had known earlier, the smart thing to do would have been to shut down the team. We never would have had the experience of making the game. All I really felt was gratitude that we had gotten to see it through."

In 1996, Disney Interactive decided to release the original game on PC. Not being tied to cartridge manufacturers and signing contracts with partners, this time the team took revenge for the so-called 'failure' of the game on Sega's console. *Maui*'s artists improved the original graphics, and the atmosphere had been beautifully conveyed by high-quality tracks originally created by the composer and sound designer before converting them to the Sega sound chip. The PC version also got its own promo campaign in the USA.

It was then that it was decided to change the name of the game to *Maui Mallard In Cold Shadow*, but why? "In Europe, it was felt strongly that Donald Duck was a primary selling point so the game was marketed as *Donald In Maui Mallard*," answers Craig. "However, in the US it was felt that Donald would skew the game too young for the targeted gaming audience and there would be greater value from launching a new franchise. After many marketing meetings, it was decided the franchise name would be *Cold Shadow*."

"*Cold Shadow* is actually the third name for the game," recalls John. "We wanted the PC version to be a fresh start and announce a new line of titles from Disney Interactive for PC gaming. So we decided to rename *Maui Mallard* to *Bad Mojo* or *Mojo Rising*, as a reference to voodoo and the haunted island. Somebody at Disney felt that 'Mojo' had sexual and pagan meaning and we had to abandon *Bad Mojo*."

» [Mega Drive] The animation is of the kind of high quality you'd expect from a Disney product.

» [Mega Drive] These little guys are aggressive, and armed with dangerous buzzsaw yo-yos.

At the same time, Nintendo bought the game rights from DI and at the end of 1996 independently released the SNES version in North America, taking over the new title and cover from the PC edition. Surprisingly, both studios did not finish NTSC builds of the game for SNES and Genesis consoles in the US until August and November 1996 respectively - a whole year later than the completion of similar PAL versions of the game. The Japanese Super Famicom build was finished in October 1996.

Despite the game's release on Windows and the belated release on SNES, this did not save *Maui* from rapid oblivion. Players were focused on the next-gen consoles like PlayStation, and Sega had by then switched its focus to Saturn. Although *Maui*'s release on Genesis was repeatedly promised in the US gaming press and at CES in early 1996, American Genesis gamers never actually saw the game – apart from a handful of Sega Channel subscribers. The opportune moment was missed.

"*Maui Mallard* was released in the US a full year after we completed it, and that was due to the company waffling on whether they wanted to release it at all," concludes assistant producer David Bergantino. "When they finally decided to, 16-bit was dying, which made it seem like a failure of a game. Had it been released earlier, our feeling was that it would have been a top-selling game for 16-bit."

Perhaps the firstborn of Disney Interactive just came into being at the wrong time, but even a quarter of a century later, it has not lost its feathers. Recently the PC version of the game was released on Steam and now *Maui Mallard* is primed to reach a new audience as well as its original fans. Considering *Maui Mallard*'s difficult birth, it may seem surprising that the game still finds new fans among the younger generations. But should we be surprised at this? Patrick Gilmore gives a philosophical answer, "I have faith in the knowledge that nothing good stays buried forever."

Thanks to John Fiorito, Patrick Gilmore, David Bergantino, Craig Allen, Sue Shakespeare, Kurt Dumas, Patrick Collins, Mat Sneap and Jon Williams for sharing their memories and artefacts. *Maui Mallard 2* will be in issue 226.

DOUBLE IMPACT

EUROCOM'S LEAD PROGRAMMER JON WILLIAMS AND PRODUCER MAT SNEAP HIGHLIGHT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RIVAL CONSOLE VERSIONS

Jon: "We'd never be able to get the SNES version completed on time if we had to rely on the builds and videos we were receiving of the lead Genesis version. This eventually led to the decision to allow the two versions to differ where necessary while still using the same source assets."

Mat: "We were working blind. The guys in the US were up against it and so were we. There literally wasn't time for us to wait and see what they did and then convert it. So really we were tasked with 'Here's a bunch of Genesis graphics that we've not implemented yet, but are working on. Make something cool with them up for SNES.'"

Jon: "We had the original game design document but the Disney team made lots of changes along the way when they found things didn't work. We had to find a way to create a fun bonus level in the shortest possible time so I adapted the organ bounce routines to work on the stage graphics."

Mat: "The graphics had been redrawn, this was partly because of extra colours available and pixel ratios on-screen. We used a more standard messy dither as the SNES pixels were wider so the effect they used on Genesis didn't work."

Jon: "The speedrun was probably not incorporated into the SNES version as we had a limit on the number of sprites on a line."

Mat: "I'm not too sure why there were differences there, again maybe time things. Hitting some of these deadlines takes a massive effort."

Jon: "I remember seeing the Genesis version of the Frog gameplay for the first time and wondering how we could possibly replicate it on SNES. We found out later that the Genesis version was changed but it was too late for us to follow any changes they'd made."

Mat: "I seem to remember Jon Williams and I working crazy hours to get it done. He fell asleep on his keyboard one night and managed to draw a line of random blocks across a level with his nose… he honestly did that."

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Power Diggerz

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION » **RELEASED:** 2000 » **DEVELOPER:** TAITO

It was pretty cheap, and you could have sworn that you read something good about it in a magazine, but deep down you've got a horrible suspicion that *Power Diggerz* might actually be a duffer. Really, how many great games are there about heavy machinery? Once you switch on the console, the bright menus don't help dispel the impression that you might have bought a game for children. The initial sand scooping game feels a bit complex, but by the time you get to batter a car, you're finding yourself getting into it.

That's when you switch to Part-Timer Mode, and are confronted with a set of frankly bizarre job listings. There's one about being a chef, another about being an "athletic single lane driver" – whatever that might be – and one about saving turtles. Suddenly, you're by a lovely swimming pool and expected to use your digger to scoop turtles from inside it to transfer them to a smaller pool. Somehow, it's both a complete surprise and exactly what you expected, and you can't wait to find out what else is in store.

BIO

Power Diggerz is essentially a series of minigames in which you scoop, bash and dig with licensed Komatsu vehicles to achieve various goals. Initially released in Japanese arcades in 1999 under the name *Power Shovel Ni Norou*, Taito converted its scoop-'em-up to the PlayStation the following year. It then came to North America as *Power Shovel*, and was picked up by JVC in Europe in 2001. The game's unique premise and sound execution earned review scores of 92% in *Play* and 8/10 in the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*, but it was a one hit wonder as Taito never revisited the concept.

MORE CLASSIC POWER DIGGERZ MOMENTS

Car Crusher

It turns out that smashing up cars is really fun, whether you're doing that with your fists in *Street Fighter II* or construction equipment in *Power Diggerz*. The goal is simple – extend that crane arm, keep whacking the thing in different spots to destroy doors and windows, then enjoy your reward as it finally perishes in a spectacularly explosive fashion.

Home Wrecker

The remains of an old house need to be pulled down, and you're the person in charge of doing it. But this is no mindless demolition job, as you'll lose a precious five seconds of time each time you hit one of the neighbouring buildings. Only those with the highest levels of speed and skill can complete this task satisfactorily.

Irritating Crane

You know that carnival game where you try to pass a rod through a metal maze without touching the sides, as seen in games like *The Irritating Maze*? That's exactly what you're doing here – except of course with a massive crane arm on a construction vehicle, rather than a small metal object. We'd ask why, but who cares? It's fun.

Hot Stuff

Plates of rice arrive on rollers. It is your job to fill these plates with curry, either hot, hotter or hottest – our diners don't care about specific types of curry, just the heat, and won't take the wrong thing. The plates carry 200 litres of curry, and thus must be absolutely massive. Sense? Don't bother looking for it around here.

FROM THE ARCHIVES
STRICTLY LIMITED

Physical production of games has become a choice rather than a necessity on modern consoles and Strictly Limited Games is one of the companies offering those hard copies, but it also has goals in the retro realm and they're already being achieved

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

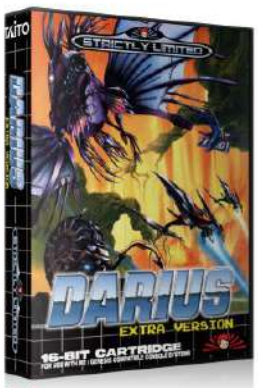
If you're a collector of physical videogames, you will almost certainly have come across limited release publishers over the last few years. These companies produce physical versions of games, often those that have proven popular in the digital download market, in small quantities for collectors. These kinds of releases divide opinion, but they're definitely popular as there are quite a few companies now operating in the space, including Limited Run Games, Special Reserve Games and Super Rare Games. Enter Strictly Limited Games, a German publisher founded in 2017 by both Dennis Mendel and Benedict Braitsch. It operates much like the other companies mentioned, but has a particularly strong tendency towards releasing games in and around the retro gaming scene.

After working in education and localisation, Dennis joined Softdistribution, where he and Benedict came up with the idea to start Strictly Limited Games. "That has always been a dream of mine, and while I was in science I realised that a lot of videogames are no longer available – even the publishers don't have them any more sometimes, or the publisher changed or vanished or whatever," says Dennis, sitting in front of shelves filled with games from the PlayStation 2 to the PC-FX. "It was very exciting to start Strictly Limited with Benedict. He's a different generation, he grew up with Steam and has a huge digital library. I'm very much into collecting, I grew up with physical stuff and I love physical videogames, it's always nice to know that you can still play them in ten or twenty years – you know, if the console still works."

It's fair to say that preservation is a key goal of the publisher, but Dennis is quick to explain the other motivations behind the endeavour. "It would be a lie if I said it was only about preserving, because I am a collector so of course there's a personal interest in it. I love to have these games in physical form on my shelf, so basically the games that we are selling are games that we think need to be preserved," he says, before expanding on that philosophy. "In general every game needs to be preserved. The film industry has lost a lot of films from directors that later became famous, but at that time were not

» Strictly Limited Games is reissuing expensive cartridge games, but you'll be able to distinguish them from originals.

» Formerly exclusive to the Mega Drive Mini, *Darius Extra Version* got a cart release officially sanctioned by Taito.



> "THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DREAM OF MINE, AND WHILE I WAS IN SCIENCE I REALISED THAT A LOT OF VIDEOGAMES ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE – EVEN THE PUBLISHERS DON'T HAVE THEM ANY MORE SOMETIMES"
>
> **DENNIS MENDEL**

» [PS4] *Tokyo 42* holds the honour of being the first game to go physical with Strictly Limited Games.

famous, so these films got trashed or they burned in a fire when some studio went down. We see the same here with videogames, a lot of games are only available in digital form and whenever some store decides to switch or change, or goes out of business like PlayStation Mobile, you no longer have access to these games – they are just lost."

The core of the Strictly Limited Games business is much the same as that of other limited release publishers.

"We started with the low-hanging fruit, taking already existing videogames and putting them in physical form – we are not the only ones, so that's not very new," admits Dennis, though he explains that he's actually pleased to be one of many in this regard. "I think the more, the merrier because it's absolutely impossible for one publisher to save them all. Even for all our other competitors, we all share the same passion for videogames. I think for all of us, it's great to see that so many games can be preserved by all these different limited publishers, and we are trying to contribute as much as we can. But we've also decided to make something different, which led to *Ultracore* and *Clockwork Aquario*."

That's what really sets Super Rare Games apart from other companies in the sector – a commitment to preserving not only released games, but also those that have previously gone unreleased. "This is basically the next step. When you love games and you are interested in the history of videogames, and then you hear that there are so many [unreleased] games created by famous companies that were historically relevant, like DICE – they are still very historically relevant, and Westone," says Dennis. "I think now that we know what *Clockwork Aquario* looks like, and I think everybody who will see and play the game will think the same, if this game would have never come out then this would really be a shame because it's so gorgeous, but at the time it wasn't [released] because it was regarded as outdated. At that time 3D games were relevant, and then these games just never came out, the studio went out of business and another game is lost. We thought that whenever we have a chance to make something right again, then we try to help here."

But how exactly does the company get the chance to rectify such historical injustices? "It's always a mixture of some personal ambitions mixed with being at the right place and the right time, and having some friends that support us – it's never a one-man show," says Dennis. "I had seen *Ultracore* before, there was one presentation video on YouTube and also some early reviews in magazines – my parents ran a book store, so I had a lot of magazines to read." From that basic level of awareness, connections began to be formed. "Some friends of ours said, 'Hey, I know somebody who knows somebody who has access to this and that.' Then we started to evaluate how we could bring this game back, what else needed to be done except for the development itself. There was a lot of luck involved as well, because it's never clear in the beginning if you'll find someone who has access to this data, but once we knew we could get access to

[PS4] *99 Vidas* was one of the company's first releases, and is a retro-styled beat-'em-up.

» Dennis Mendel is a cofounder of Strictly Limited games and a big collector of videogames.

» As well as more elaborate collector's editions, some standard releases come with extras like this pin badge.

» [PS4] *Fox N Forests* is the kind of indie game that Strictly Limited Games generally prefers, with a pixel-art aesthetic.

» [PS4] Taito is one of the companies that has a fairly extensive working relationship with Strictly Limited Games.

TIMELINE

2017
■ Strictly Limited Games is founded by Dennis Mendel and Benedict Braitsch in Kirchheim unter Teck, Germany.

2017
■ The company produces its first game, a physical edition of the PS4 game Tokyo 42 by SMAC Games and Mode 7.

2018
■ Publishing is expanded to cover the PlayStation Vita with the release of *QUByte Interactive's* game *99 Vidas*.

2018
■ The retro-inspired platformer *Fox N Forests* becomes the first Strictly Limited Games release for Nintendo's Switch.

2018
■ Strictly Limited Games publishes its first game in a retro series, *Sayonara Umihara Kawase++* for the Vita.

2019
■ In partnership with Digital Illusions CE, the lost Mega Drive run-and-gun *Ultracore* is finished and released.

2019
■ *Ninja Saviours: Return Of The Warriors* marks the first release in an ongoing publishing relationship with Taito.

2020
■ *Super Turrican: Director's Cut* and *Super Turrican 2* mark the company's first foray into the SNES cartridge market.

2020
■ Preorders open for *Darius Extra Version* on Mega Drive cartridge, ending its Mega Drive Mini exclusivity.

2020
■ The company announces the lost Westone arcade game *Clockwork Aquario* will be finished for Switch and PS4.

» [PS4] The company has released quite a few shoot-'em-ups, including *Cotton Reboot*, *Vasara* and *R-Type Dimensions* here.

» [Switch] The company's output really runs the gamut of gaming history, with even the venerable *Space Invaders* series welcome.

this data we got everyone on board who needed to be informed about it, and the team basically formed itself."

Ultracore was released on Mega Drive cartridge and the company has also moved towards reprinting cartridge games such as *Super Turrican 2*, with the cartridges manufactured by another German company, DragonBox. "Whenever we get the chance we release or re-release a game that is extremely expensive," says Dennis, who is motivated by trying to strike a fair deal for both creators and consumers. "For example when I think of the Natsume games, the price of *Wild Guns* or *The Ninja Saviors*, or if you look at the price of *Panorama Cotton*, how much this costs now. It's a shame that people can't get access to it. It's the worst thing to use a knock-off reproduction where it's not official, it's not fair to release a game without the knowledge of the original creators. Our retro cartridge releases are the next best thing you can get to the first release because it's an officially licensed game by the partner that made the game."

> "GAMES IN GENERAL ARE DEAR TO MY HEART, BUT DUE TO THE FACT THAT MY WIFE IS JAPANESE, I STUDIED JAPANESE, I'VE ALWAYS FOCUSED ON JAPANESE VIDEOGAMES AS WELL"
>
> **DENNIS MENDEL**

The reaction of existing collectors is always a thorny issue when it comes to these kinds of releases, but Dennis feels that the way the company handles them should satisfy them. "Of course I understand if collectors don't want to see another release of their game, but we don't want to make a close reproduction of the original, because that's already there," he tells us. "With *Ultracore* that was easy because that game never came out, but with our upcoming releases, with *Turrican* and others we try to have fresh cover artwork – actually we do the same as any other publisher back then would have done if they handled the console release. We are asking Mike Winterbauer to draw cover art for the *Turrican* game, or Tom DuBois, so even for the collectors it's basically a new release because we don't want to compete with the initial release."

Strictly Limited Games has had a remarkable journey, but it hasn't always been a smooth one as the company first faced difficulties. "When you have no name – we came out of nothing – and you're trying to reach out to other potential partners, they have never heard your name so of course it's quite difficult to start. But fortunately we were able to convince great partners to work with us," says Dennis. Indeed, in less than five years Strictly Limited Games has been trusted to release games in classic franchises including *R-Type*, *Turrican*, *Wonder Boy*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Darius* and *Space Invaders*. Beyond that, the company operates as a partner store selling games by other publishers including Retro-Bit, Dotemu and Sekai Games. "Games in general are dear to my heart, but due to the fact that my wife is Japanese, I studied Japanese, I've always focused on Japanese videogames as well," Dennis admits. "We know all of their games well and like them a lot – of course, it's business, but it's also about treating the IPs well and to have a personal attachment is important as well, because it's still the baby of our partners and you would never want to give away your baby to someone who doesn't treat it well."

» [Switch] *Clockwork Aquario* was an arcade game never finished by Westone, and is currently being prepared for its first ever release.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

DENNIS MENDEL

■ Dennis previously worked at the Fraunhofer Institute For Digital Media Technology, focusing on videogame literacy and history, and spent some time in London undertaking German localisation for Square Enix. He joined Softdistribution in 2015 and would become a cofounder of Strictly Limited Games in 2017. At the time of writing, Dennis is still with the company and continues to work on its day to day business of releasing games for Switch, PS4 and retro consoles.

BENEDICT BRAITSCH

■ After spending a few years as a trainee specialist in media and information services at the University Of Stuttgart, PC gaming aficionado Benedict became a marketing assistant at Softdistribution in September 2016, and just six months later he cofounded Strictly Limited Games alongside Dennis. Benedict continues to work for the company at the time of writing, and describes his passion as "retro 2D pixel art". He hopes to reissue the PC RPG *To The Moon* at some point in the future.

KEY GAMES TO CONSIDER

TOKYO 42

■ The first game released by Strictly Limited Games shows a lot of the hallmarks of the company's later releases, and set the tone for things to come. While it's not a retro game, this indie game is a 2D game which has a heavy Japanese influence, despite being developed in London.

ULTRACORE

■ Strictly Limited Games has a goal of making previously unfinished games available in complete form, and this lost run-and-gun from *Battlefield* and *Pinball Dreams* developer Digital Illusions CE exemplifies that. As well as acting as the publisher on Switch, PS4 and Mega Drive, Strictly Limited Games finished the game's development.

» [Switch] *Darius: Cozmic Collection* was split across two cartridges, as the digital version was similarly divided.

» [PS4] Strictly Limited Games doesn't always get every version of games it publishes – *Hyper Sentinel* was also on Switch.

» As well as creating limited edition videogames, Strictly Limited Games is working on appropriate merchandising too.

According to Dennis, another thing that the company has found difficult is being based in Germany. Despite being home to Nintendo's operations in the region, various historical factors have ensured that the country has long preferred home computers to consoles. "As you probably know, Germany has not that long of a history with videogames – it's more the UK or France, where you have a lot of support from the early days and then Rare or Ubisoft resulted out of this. In Germany, of course there were always some special cases like Factor 5 or Crytek and such, but usually Germany is a special place for videogames. But recently things have become better, and I think the German game industry does a lot to improve the situation," he tells us. "It wasn't that easy to start this thing out from Germany, especially because German is not a language everyone reads and understands. That's why we decided to choose English language only for our website, and our releases usually have only English text on them."

Being such a young company, there are plenty of things for Strictly Limited Games to do, and there are plans to eventually enter the Japanese market. Then there are the odd lofty dreams – Dennis realises that his hope of doing something new with the Earthbound series "will probably forever be a dream", and offering Xbox versions of games "if I ever find out that we will not have to bury a lot of copies in some desert". In the meantime, the company is doing some important work in keeping physical games available for those of us that prefer to own them, and continues to make exciting steps in widening access to lost and prohibitively expensive games. We look forward to seeing what the company will come up with in the future – particularly anything that happens to be delivered on a brand-new cartridge.

» [PS4] We mostly chose this screenshot because we really like *Lode Runner*, rather than anything else.

BUBBLE BOBBLE 4 FRIENDS

■ Taito has had quite a few games released through Strictly Limited Games now, but the big deal with this one is that the game was upgraded significantly after the physical release. The company offered a special low-priced cartridge and inlay upgrade bundle exclusively for buyers of the original version.

DARIUS: COZMIC COLLECTIONS

■ These two compilations from Taito are unusual, in that each features a limited selection of games divided across console and arcade lines. While this isn't a common approach across its range as a whole, a similar approach of releasing two versions with unique line-ups was later used for the *Turrican* compilations.

XENO CRISIS

■ While many Strictly Limited Games releases are from established retro franchises, the company continues to produce physical versions of new greats. While there were many versions with which it had no involvement at all, the company did the production honours for the Switch and PS4 versions of this modern classic.

0%

Super Smash Bros

NOT THE HELPING HAND I NEEDED

RETROREVIVAL

» NINTENDO 64 » 1999 » HAL LABORATORY

Although it excelled in numerous areas, the N64 was pretty poorly supported when it came to essential fighting games. Granted, *Fighters Destiny* is an excellent brawler, but many of the big names like *Street Fighter* didn't reach the machine so your choices were limited and the few titles that were available were typically quite poor.

Thank goodness then for *Super Smash Bros*, an N64 game that I've spent a disgusting amount of time playing over the years. Many will argue that it's as much a party game as it is a fighting game, but I've always found its brawling mechanics to be surprisingly deep and, best of all, it has a rather excellent single-player mode that I'm still happy to sink time into today.

Eight characters are initially available and they all play differently to each other meaning there's plenty of variety packed into HAL Laboratory's game. Initially you'll take part in bouts against a single opponent, but as you climb the ranks you'll often find yourself facing off against multiple Yoshis or teaming up with some computer controlled allies to take down a gigantic Donkey Kong. Every few stages HAL throws in a curveball in the style of neat minigames that require you to either hit a number of targets, light up a certain number of platforms or simply race through an area as quickly as possible. Many of these layouts are unique to each character meaning there's plenty of replay value down the line.

Eventually you'll come to the final guardian of *Super Smash Bros* and if I'm honest it's an absolute pig to beat. The game's boss takes the form of a gigantic gloved hand who slaps, flicks, punches and pummels you into submission. Despite the general toughness of the battle it remains great fun because HAL has imbued Master Hand with so much character. Watching this animated hand perform its numerous attacks can be hilarious at times, particularly when it makes a finger gun and then proceeds to blast Bullet Bills at you, or when it walks across the screen on its fingers, only to flick you away like you might swat an annoying insect.

Fighting against Master Hand isn't always fair but it certainly is memorable, which is probably why the villain has featured in so many of the later games.

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO RHYTHM ACTION GAMES

BEAT BY BEAT, WE GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE HISTORY OF A GENRE THAT MAKES YOU FEEL THE FLOW OF MUSIC LIKE NO OTHER

WORDS BY PAUL WALKER-EMIG

In these Bluffer's Guides, we sometimes end up complicating simplified narratives that attribute the origin of a genre to one or two particular games, but in the case of rhythm action, there really is one game that defined it. Yes, games existed before that had some relationship with music – *Mario Paint* on the SNES had a music composition feature when it released in 1992, *Break Dance* from 1984 on the C64 had you memorising sequences of dance moves that you had to repeat in the fashion of Ralph Bear's famous call and response memory toy, Simon, and 1987 NES title *Dance Aerobics* made an early claim for innovating the genre, tasking you with matching your virtual aerobic instructor's movements on the Power Play controller mat. But in terms of a game explicitly based on tying your interactions to the rhythm of music, a game that set the template for what we would today recognise as rhythm action, there is one originator: *PaRappa The Rapper*.

First released in Japan in 1996 before making it over to the West in 1997, this surreal PlayStation title about a rapping dog trying to an impress a flower-girl that he's got a crush on was a huge hit, helping to set the stage for a host of titles that would build on the ideas it innovated. Similar to the likes of Simon and *Break Dance*, *PaRappa* had you repeating prompts delivered by characters, but the difference here was that you had to time your button presses to match the music to be successful.

Marc Flury, co-creator of self-described 'rhythm-violence' title *Thumper* and a former Harmonix developer who worked on the likes of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, was one of many for whom *PaRappa* was his first encounter with the genre. He places its emergence in the context of an era of experimentation. "In that era of PlayStation and PlayStation 2, there were a lot of weird games, especially coming out of Japan. It seemed to me that the music ones were kind of the weirdest and they excited me for some reason. I think because it showed that games had more potential than I originally thought as a kid. Games could do more."

This weirdness that Marc refers to is apparent in many of the genre's most favourably regarded games, which have often enjoyed a cult status as opposed to massive commercial success. "*Gitaroo Man* blew me away," says Marc on the 2002 PlayStation 2 release where you play as a young boy battling an intergalactic empire using a legendary guitar-like weapon. "It was kind of like *PaRappa The Rapper*, but this feeling of a story merged with music gameplay perfected." Simogo's Simon Flesser, who recently found success with the critically acclaimed *Sayonara Wild Hearts*, described *Gitaroo Man* as his first "click" with the genre. "I think it excels at flowing with the music," he says.

Where *Gitaroo Man* plays with a brand of upbeat cartoon surrealism very much recognisable in *PaRappa The Rapper* and its sequels, *Um Jammer Lammy* on the PlayStation and *PaRappa The Rapper 2* on the PS2, another of the genre's cult hits was already stretching the boundaries of what we can define as rhythm action in 2002 with its own brand of surrealism.

"It was clear it was trying to do something different than most games," says Marc on Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 title *Rez*. Blending elements of rail shooters with rhythmic feedback where the hits of your bullets feed back into beats of the game's music, *Rez* creates an incredible aesthetic experience that feels spiritually within the bounds of rhythm action, even though you could quite reasonably question whether it fits the technical definition.

"*Rez* and the vibes of Sega games generally was a big influence for *Sayonara Wild Hearts*," says Simon on the way the game impacted him. "Generally, on-rails games were a bigger influence than rhythm games. Things like *Rez*, *Star Fox* and *Sin & Punishment*. I think in some ways the genres are similar, in that they are so directed, in their flow and, indeed, rhythm."

Marc points to the arcades of the late-Nineties as another arena where he had early encounters with rhythm action through the likes of *GuitarFreaks* – the progenitor of *Guitar Hero* – and *Karaoke Revolution*. Here Japan further stakes its claim as the homeland of rhythm action, its arcades a breeding ground for a host of iconic titles that spread throughout the world.

Konami played a particularly important role, starting with the huge success of *Beatmania*, a

Before *PaRappa The Rapper* shook things up we had fun electronic games like Simon.

[NES] *Dance Aerobics* was another early attempt at the genre and was compatible with the NES' Power Pad.

[PlayStation] Dancing with onions is the type of weirdness that helped define *Parappa The Rapper* and its sequel, *Um Jammer Lammy*, shown here.

» [PlayStation] Licensed music and rhythm action go hand in hand, and unsurprisingly, several Disney games exist.

1997 DJ-themed cabinet with turntable controls; *Dance Dance Revolution*, where players stand on a dance platform and step on arrow buttons to match the music and prompts displayed on-screen, and the aforementioned *GuitarFreaks* in 1999. In fact Konami had so much success with the genre that it has a studio called Bemani, dedicated to churning out its many music releases. If you've even been in an arcade, you've likely encountered, if not one of these games, then one of the hosts of sequels and spin-offs – *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Beatmania* both have 2nd, 3rd, and 4th mixes and beyond, with *Dance Dance Revolution* getting updated versions as recently as 2020 via *Dance Dance Revolution A20 Plus*. Konami's success would continue with the likes of *Dance Maniax*, *Pop'n Music*, *Pop'n Stage*, *Keyboardmania* and countless others.

The success of many of these titles would also lead to home console releases. There were a bevy of *Beatmania* games in Japan for the PlayStation, Game Boy Color, and even the WonderSwan. Only one, however, made it to Europe on the PlayStation in 2000, simply titled *Beatmania*. *Dance Dance Revolution* has been far more prolific on home machines in Europe and the US, with *Dance Dance Revolution Disney Mix* hitting the PlayStation in 2001, *Dance Dance Revolution SuperNova* coming to PlayStation 2 in 2006 in the US and 2007 in Europe, and further titles coming to the GameCube, PS3, Wii, Xbox 360 and PC over the years.

Japan's contributions to the genre extend to providing inspiration to the studio that has had by far the biggest impact on rhythm action in the West: Harmonix. The company was founded in 1995 to explore the potentials of technology to help people perform music. Greg LoPiccolo, who spent almost 19 years at the company, joined in 1999, just as Harmonix was thinking about making the transition to exploring videogames. "Music games had just started to take off in Japan, and we were playing

Time Line

1996
Parappa The Rapper is released in Japan, kickstarting the genre as it's known today and becoming a big success in the process.

1997
Beatmania hits the arcades for the very first time, kickstarting a strong rhythm action arcade culture that's primarily led by Konami.

1998
The legendary and long-running *Dance Dance Revolution* series makes its debut, again released by Konami. It also releases *Pop'n Music* in arcades.

1999
NanaOn-Sha follows up *PaRappa The Rapper* with *Um Jammer Lammy*, which debuted on Sony's PlayStation and reaches arcades by the year's end.

2001
Harmonix releases its first game in the form of *Frequency* for the PS2 and *Rez* releases in Japan to critical acclaim. Namco releases the first *Taiko No Tatsujin* games in arcades. The clone and engine StepMania is released on PC.

2002
Gitaroo Man hits the PS2 to positive critical reception and *Rez* makes its way to Europe and the US.

2005
The first *Guitar Hero* is released, kicking off the plastic-peripheral instrument phenomenon.

them as imports," Greg recalls. "Exposure to these games was definitely a factor in our decision to try this direction for Harmonix.

Harmonix's first forays into this arena were *Frequency* and *Amplitude*, released in 2001 and 2003 for the PS2. "The idea was to take the kind of beat-match gameplay that we were seeing in titles like *Beatmania*, but extend it to a multitrack experience and express it in 3D," Greg explains. "Reviews were very good, sales not so much. I think it was because the concept was new and hard to explain. Sony had a difficult time marketing them, as they were really unique for that time."

A few years later, Harmonix would find a far more successful formula. "There was a Japanese rhythm action game called *GuitarFreaks* that had a plastic-guitar controller," Greg recalls. "We were approached by a small game publisher called Red Octane, who had the ability to manufacture peripherals in China, and asked if we would be interested in making a guitar-based game, but with a Western soundtrack and design focus." This game would become *Guitar Hero*, a mega-smash that would spawn a billion dollar franchise on the back of a plastic-guitar-peripheral phenomenon that gave you the illusion of being a rock star playing along with famous songs you know and love.

"It is fair to say that we were surprised at the level of success that *Guitar Hero* had," says Greg. "We were very happy with it, and hoped that it would find an audience, but we had no idea it would blow up to that degree."

Guitar Hero was far from the first game to introduce musical peripherals to the world. As well as *GuitarFreaks*, *Samba Di Amigo* tried to get us shaking our maracas on the Dreamcast in 2000 and Namco created *Donkey Konga* in 2004 for Nintendo's GameCube, which came with a bongo drum controller. It's worth noting that *Donkey Konga* is essentially a Nintendo-branded take on Namco's very own *Taiko No Tatsujin* series, which started off life in arcades in 2001, before finding its way to PS2 (although it's rarely made it to the West). The gameplay UI wasn't a revelation either, using a scrolling note track system similar to what Harmonix employed in *Frequency* and *Amplitude*.

However, *Guitar Hero* found a way to put things together that made it eclipse the success of any of those games that came before it.

"I think Harmonix was able to polish and fix a lot of the usability issues with *GuitarFreaks*, make it look more engaging and feel better to play," Marc says on what made *Guitar Hero* a next-level hit. "They added this great rock and roll aesthetic that they really went all in on. It wasn't some generic guitar simulator; it was rock music specifically. I think that coincided with what a lot of people like to do, which is rock out in their living rooms. A lot of young people who want to join a band, all they want to do is hold guitars and jump around and that gave them the opportunity to do that. I think those social reasons were why it was a big success versus just gameplay reasons."

After developing a sequel released in 2006, Activision would buy the rights to *Guitar Hero* and shift development to Neversoft. Harmonix started a rival series that would battle it out with *Guitar Hero* over the coming years.

"It seemed totally obvious to extend the concept to a full band," says Greg on the genesis of *Rock Band*. "As soon as it became clear that we were going to get to continue to work on rock music simulators, we immediately started design discussions around the rest of the instruments. We already had a vocal scoring mechanic from the karaoke games we had made, and bass was obviously covered by the guitar mechanic, so the biggest additional design work was on the drums – which was a lot of work!"

A host of sequels from both series, including various tie-ins like *Guitar Hero: Metallica* and *The Beatles: Rock Band* were big business, but, eventually, interest waned. The peripheral-instrument market crashed and plastic guitars were confined to closets and tossed in skips as the world collectively decided its rock and roll days were numbered.

"We had begun work on *Rock Band 4* when *Rock Band 3* shipped, and when the sales of *RB3* were disappointing, we knew we couldn't sustain development at that level," says Greg, recalling the end of the phenomenon. "The reasons are complicated, but I think the main issue was that it was hard to evolve the core mechanic to something beyond pure beat-match, and I think the audience got tired of that. There was also a lot of product

» [PlayStation] Konami's *Beatmania* was a big hit in arcades and soon made its way to popular consoles of the time.

» [PS2] The rock and roll of *Guitar Hero* hit a note with wannabe rockstars everywhere.

» [PS2] *Frequency* is where it all started for legendary rhythm action developer Harmonix.

2006 Activision buys *Guitar Hero* while MTV Games buys Harmonix, ending its association with the series.

2007 Harmonix releases a *Guitar Hero* rival in the form of the multi-instrument *Rock Band*.

2008 *Tap Tap Revenge* releases on iOS, highlighting just how well-suited touchscreens were for rhythm action games.

2009 The first *Just Dance* is released for the Nintendo Wii, using motion control to get players dancing. Activision releases *DJ Hero* and lets you scratch to your heart's content, while Sega unleashes *Hatsune Miku: Project Diva*.

2010 *Dance Central* is released for the Xbox 360's Kinect, seeking to show the potential of camera controlled gaming.

2011 Activision closes its *Guitar Hero* division, signalling the end of the by now struggling plastic-peripheral sub-genre.

2016 Audioshield brings rhythm action to VR, the *Amplitude* remake is released for PS3 and PS4, and *Thumper* comes out for PS4, PSVR and Oculus Rift.

2020 *Dance Dance Revolution* gets an update in the form of A20 Plus, *BPM: Bullets Per Minute* is released, as is Harmonix's latest, *Fuser*.

jammed into the marketplace in a very short time. More than the users could sustain."

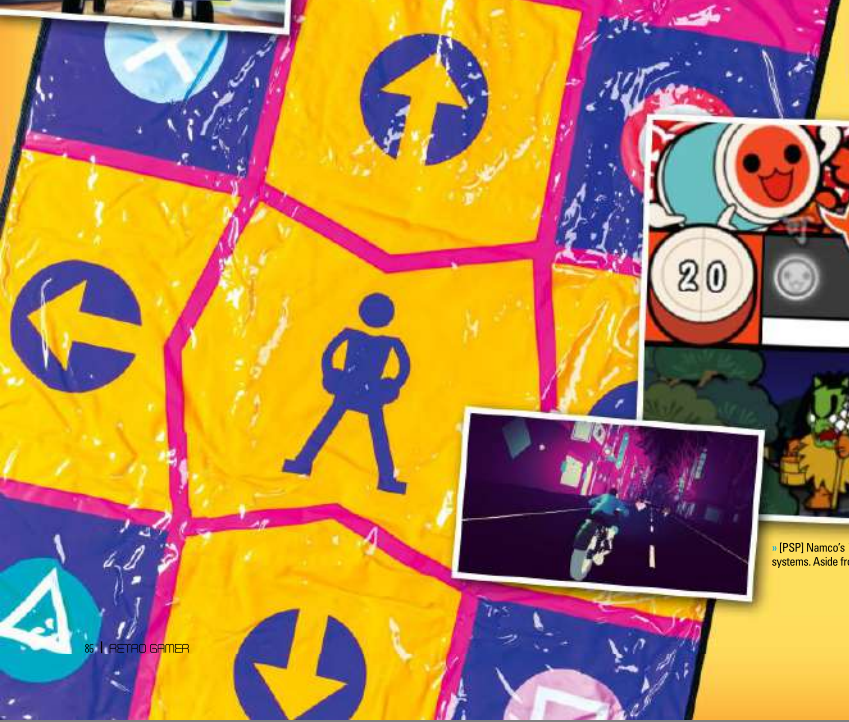
By the end of the decade, these games were as good as done. There was a brief revival attempt in 2015 with the release of *Guitar Hero Live* and *Rock Band 4*, but these failed to reignite the genre to previous levels of success.

Rhythm action, however, was far from over. Numerous companies were still finding success, particularly Sega with its *Hatsune Miku: Project Diva* series, which began life on PSP in 2009 and features the popular Vocaloid Hatsune Miku. One of the successes of the genre in general though is that it has tended to adapt well to new technological innovations – *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* was one of the Nintendo DS' early successes in Japan, utilising its touchscreen technology to such success that a high demand for imports led to the development of a version for the West in the form of *Elite Beat Agents* in 2006, for example. In fact, mobile phones and tablets have become another haven for rhythm action-based games thanks to titles like *Tap Tap Revenge, Cytus, Love Live: School Idol Festival, Rhythm Of Fighters* and countless others. Activision, buoyed by the success of the *Guitar Hero* brand, collaborated with FreeStyleGames to create *DJ Hero*. While the developer's first attempt at rhythm action (the bizarre *B-Boy*) fell rather flat, *DJ Hero* was a far better showcase of its talents and was arguably enhanced by the addition of a deck you could spin and scratch on. Its success led to a sequel in 2010.

When it came to the emergence of motion control in the form of the Nintendo Wii and Xbox 360's Kinect, rhythm action was once again at the forefront. Moving from playing instruments, to enjoying music through dance, Ubisoft's second-largest franchise behind *Assassin's Creed, Just Dance,* released on the Wii in 2009, spawning a yearly series that's still going strong. Harmonix released its own take on the concept for the Xbox 360's Kinect in 2010 in the form of *Dance Central*.

The games were a great fit for motion control schemes and, like the *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* games, successfully appealed to a casual audience drawn in by the music and a fun way to experience tunes you love in a new context. We can see the same compulsion in titles that offer us a way to engage with videogame music, like *The Legend Of Zelda* in *Cadence Of Hyrule* on Switch and the *Final Fantasy* series in 3DS title *Theatrythm Final Fantasy*. "These games are appealing in part because they give players an opportunity to re-experience a musical world that they love, but in a new way," says Ryan Clark, director of *Crypt Of The Necrodancer* and *Cadence Of Hyrule*.

» [Wii] The *Just Dance* series was a huge success for Ubisoft. It made its debut on Wii in 2009 and is still going strong today.



» Rhythm action games sometimes come with a dedicated peripheral to play them.

Ultimately, though, whether you come from a causal or hardcore gaming background, the appeal is the same. "A good rhythm action game does what only a music or rhythm game can do," says Ryan. "Get you into that music-linked flow state that is so enjoyable. Games in other genres can also get you into a flow state, but there's something special about having your actions synchronised with music that affects people in a visceral way."

Rhythm action's ability to hop on to new tech has continued in the world of VR. Exploiting the already established synergy between motion control and rhythm action, it has been one of the new technologies' highlights. Marc's *Thumper* was acknowledged as one of the best titles in the early days of PSVR when it hit in 2016 and music games have consistently been some of the best rated and most popular titles on the various headsets out there, Marc pointing to the phenomenon that is *Beat Saber* as a perfect example.

"I think it combines what a lot of people want out of a VR experience. They don't just want VR, they want to be able to swing their hands around and feel like they have lightsabers. If you're going to buy a VR headset, it's an obvious game that you're gonna want to at least try. To get good high-quality VR, you need a really high framerate. That does help with rhythm games which have so much to do with timing and watching something physical cross a timing window," says Marc on the appeal of rhythm action in VR in general. "It feels smoother and the sense is more immediate. I think VR can

» [PSP] Namco's *Taiko No Tatsujin* series started off in arcades but soon reached home systems. Aside from one US PS2 release, its games have only recently reached the West.

[PS2] Learning how to switch tracks effectively in *Amplitude* is key to getting high scores.

[PS2] All these years later, *Gitaroo Man* is still considered one of the best examples of the genre.

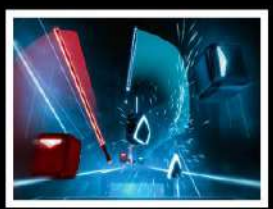
[Dreamcast] *Samba De Amigo* has a great party feel.

Spot the Difference

THE GAMES THAT HIT ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

GUITAR HERO II

The introduction of three-note chords and some killer new tracks made *Guitar Hero II* one of the highlights of the many plastic-peripheral titles. *Rock Band 3* is also a contender for king of the plastic-peripheral games, adding keyboard to drums, guitar, bass and vocals, but in truth, the best you can do is pick the one that has got the most songs you like.



BEAT SABER

This VR smash has you swinging glowing swords to slash coloured blocks flying towards you in time with the beat. It sounds crazy but it works incredibly well and highlights just how flexible the genre can be. The winner of a host of VR awards, it's one of the best titles you can get for the fledgling technology, and a good workout to boot.

GITAROO MAN

This cult classic brilliantly blends a surreal story with great rhythm gameplay, tasking you with tracking lines using the PS2 (and later PSP's) analogue stick and timing button presses. The way the game ties these into battle mechanics, where your actions restore health or do damage to the enemy is fantastic.

AMPLITUDE

For those that love the score-chasing aspect of rhythm action, where you are always returning to try and best your last attempt, *Amplitude* for the PS2 is one of the best. It's an early musical effort from Harmonix that still holds up today, which is probably why the game was remade in 2016 for the PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4.

PARAPPA THE RAPPER

It's not the most mechanically complex rhythm game out there, but it's still full of charm, memorable characters, hilariously bizarre lyrics and lots of fun, as well as a must for anyone curious about the history of the genre. Just beware that its strict timing windows can make things a bit tricky if you are trying to play the game on modern HDTVs where input lag can be an issue.

What makes a great rhythm action game?

Banging tunes

1 It goes without saying that the quality of music in a rhythm action game is of vital importance. It just has to slap! And there's plenty to choose from.

Flow state

2 The best rhythm action games get you into a state of flow where it feels like you are connected to the music, almost symbiotically.

Replay value

3 Great rhythm action games tend to have intricacies to their mechanics that make coming back and bettering your score a massive part of the appeal.

Party starting

4 Rhythm games don't *have* to be social to be good, but it's impossible to deny that many of the best find a way to help us enjoy music and games together.

Competitive edge

5 Of course, many rhythm action games feature score-based challenges, so you're going to want to compete for the most points and show off your skills.

Unified aesthetics

6 Rhythm action games thrive on feeling. Tying visuals, input, beat, theme and flow together to create a unified aesthetic takes them to the next level.

make that experience feel better and easier for the player to grasp. With *Thumper* in particular, I think we were just lucky that we had that game just about finished back in 2016 when PSVR launched. Five years ago the state of VR, despite what people say, probably wasn't ready for the room-scale move-around experience and most of the PSVR games were seated experiences. *Thumper* is by its nature one where you are not moving around. You're just sitting there, watching stuff come at you. We were lucky that it worked in VR and made adjustments to make it a good VR experience."

Of course, rhythm action isn't all about evolution through adaptation to new technology. There have been plenty of fascinating and successful attempts to innovate the genre mechanically, particularly in the indie space. For *Thumper*, that was about refocusing the genre's priorities. "There's a lot of weird music out there that we might like or new forms of music that might just work better with games. Let's stop trying to recreate the feeling of being a musician," Marc says. "A lot of the stuff that inspired the gameplay was simple action games and racing games, not necessarily music games. Like *Mario Kart*, the way you hop and slide around, the way the really fun action games like [those by] PlatinumGames can give a real feeling of hitting something and chaining your movements together. That's what we were thinking about."

In the case of *Sayonara Wild Hearts*, the idea was to pick up the legacy of games like *Rez* and make a game that would welcome people into enjoying the music. "When we made *Beat Sneak Bandit* (a 2012 rhythm puzzle game for iOS), we felt that the heavy reliance on beat was scary to a lot of people. A lot of people claim to have no sense of rhythm, and so they easily feel intimidated by just the words 'rhythm' or 'beat'. We wanted to make *Sayonara Wild Hearts* a game that would flow with the music, but would have gameplay that wasn't particularly dependent on beat-matching. I don't particularly see *SWH* as a rhythm game, but we made it with the intention so that players could really feel the flow of music through gameplay and visuals."

In the case of *Crypt Of The Necrodancer*, released for PC in 2015 before making it to PS4, Vita, Xbox One and Switch at later dates, Ryan changed the game by melding rhythm action with roguelikes to create something that uses music and rhythm in an entirely new way, having you move and attack to the beat of the music. "My design goal for *Crypt Of The Necrodancer* was to make a dungeon crawling roguelike game that felt fair," says Ryan, citing *Spelunky* as an example of a game that gets away with being extremely challenging because you are only punished for your own mistakes.

"Contrast this with the original roguelike, *Rogue*," he says. "I played the hell out of it when I was young, and despite my wealth of experience I often died due to lack of food, inadequate equipment, or just plain bad luck. I believe that the majority of *Rogue*'s generated dungeons are actually unwinnable. Yet, for some reason, I kept coming back time and time again. Despite its unfairness, I still loved it. But I wondered: would I have loved it even more if it were truly fair?" This led Ryan to the idea of making a rougelike that was time-based, but also time-limited. "This, in effect, made the game a rhythm action game, but that was not my original intent," he reveals.

The genre is continuing in all these veins and more. *BPM: Bullets Per Minute* (2020) follows in *Crypt Of The Necrodancer*'s genre mashing footsteps by bringing rhythm action to the FPS, Harmonix is continuing to build its legacy with titles like *Rock Band VR* and 2020 DJ game *Fuser*, while the early access *Rhythm Doctor* has some of that weirdness that defined the genre's early efforts, asking you to resuscitate patients to the beat while ignoring distractions. The in-development *A Musical Story* takes up the storytelling mantle, exploring the memories of a Seventies musician, and *Just Dance* continues to roll on. It seems unlikely it will ever stop. "It speaks to something very instinctive to humans," Simon reflects. "Rhythm is biological."

OBSCURE ODDITIES

OFFBEAT EXAMPLES OF GREAT RHYTHM ACTION

VIB-RIBBON

Released for the PlayStation in 2000 in Europe, this lo-fi curio allowed you to use music from any CD you put in the console to generate its levels, an idea later picked up in titles like *Audiosurf* and *Audioshield*.

BUST A GROOVE

An unusual attempt to blend rhythm action with fighting games, this 1998 PlayStation title was based around dance battles where you had to successfully combo moves to boost your score and defeat your opponents. Including a giant robot.

SPACE CHANNEL 5

Another genre mixup, the 1999 Dreamcast title *Space Channel 5* has you playing as a reporter in space who has to juggle reporting on alien threats with fighting it. In its Sixties-style visual settings the game hops between beat-match dance sections and combat sections. The series is also notable for featuring Michael Jackson.

RAYMAN LEGENDS

It's a slightly unusual pick as a rhythm action game, but that's why it's here! While for the most part *Origins* is a standard platformer, its spectacular rhythm-based platforming levels are a real highlight of the game and some of the best rhythm gaming you can find. Give it a try, you won't be disappointed.

RHYTHM DOCTOR

Currently gaining a cult following in early access on PC, *Rhythm Doctor* is a one-button rhythm game where you are defibrillating patients' hearts to the sync of a beat. The game intends to teach you about complex musical concepts like polyrhythms and hemiolas through play.

CARVE SNOWBOARDING

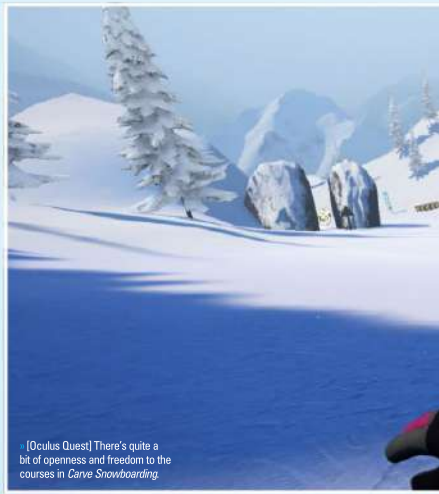
Over two decades after creating the N64 classic 1080° Snowboarding, Giles Goddard has returned with Chuhai Labs to take on the extreme sports genre once again – and with VR technology employed this time, you'll really feel the rush

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

» Giles Goddard from Chuhai Labs.

If you're a fan of Nintendo's platforms, you probably have some familiarity with Giles Goddard's work. He was a programmer on SNES Super FX games including *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*, and he has also worked on the likes of *Doshin The Giant* and *Steel Diver*. However, arguably his best known work was on the N64. As well as programming the incredible Mario face title screen for *Super Mario 64*, he was the main programmer of *1080° Snowboarding*, one of the best extreme sports games of the Nineties and a true classic for the console. Over two decades later, Giles and his team at Chuhai Labs have returned to tackle snowboarding once again.

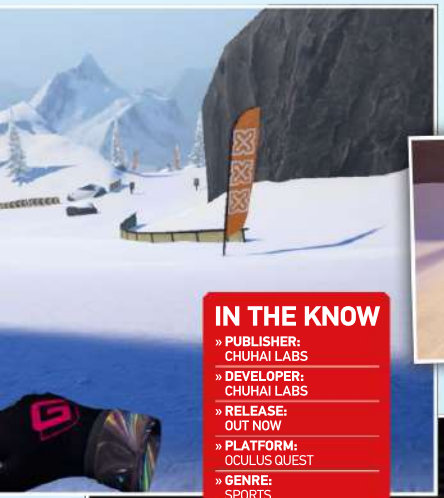
For Giles, one of the key factors in deciding to return to snowboarding was the new technology that has become available since 1998 – specifically, affordable home virtual reality kits. "I was a backer of the DK1, the original Oculus, on Kickstarter. So I had an early prototype running on that quite quickly, but obviously you needed a big PC for that and lots of setup, it wasn't a very commercially viable thing," he explains. That headset released back in 2013, and technology has improved greatly since then. "VR only really got to the point where you could do the snowboarding game that I wanted to do when the Quest came out, because I wanted a wireless snowboarding game where you could move your head freely, without having to worry about strangling yourself. So that was one big reason. I just love the idea of being able to stand in a room and do what you want, with no constraints," says Giles. "Also I hadn't seen any snowboarding games for VR or any other platforms that took my interest."



» [Oculus Quest] There's quite a bit of openness and freedom to the courses in *Carve Snowboarding*.

» [Oculus Quest] Flags direct you and your traditional VR disembodied hand towards the next big jump.

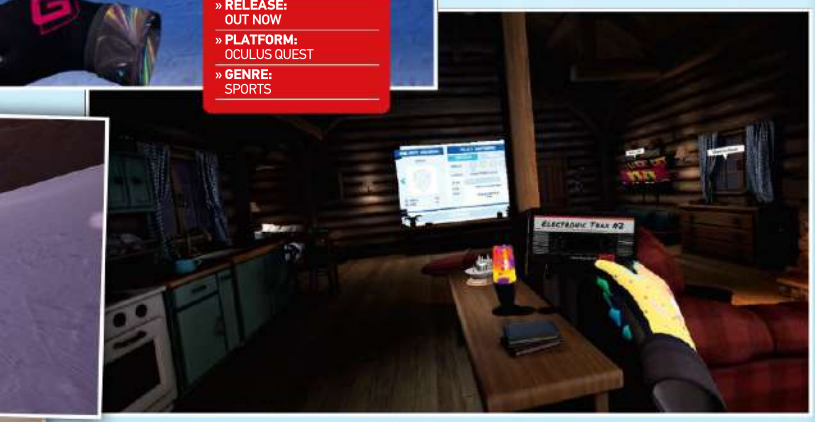
» [Oculus Quest] You can snowboard at different times of day, helping to provide a bit of visual variety.



» [Oculus Quest] As expected, grinding rails is a key part of your trick repertoire and a major component of combos.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CHUHAI LABS
» **DEVELOPER:** CHUHAI LABS
» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
» **PLATFORM:** OCULUS QUEST
» **GENRE:** SPORTS



» [Oculus Quest] Your cabin is where you'll set options, pick your board and of course choose your soundtrack.

***Carve Snowboarding* is played from a first-person perspective, with your front hand controlling the board, the back hand controlling the back, and you lift both to jump.** There are six points to grab on the board, and you can spin it with the trigger buttons. That makes the gameplay experience quite different from *1080°*, so we wondered what Giles had tried to bring over from the older game. "The dynamics – the way the board reacted with the different snow types was the main thing. I wanted to keep that same feeling, and I think we did quite well with that," he says. "And also, the way that the board feels like it's sliding underneath you. A lot of snowboarding games, it feels like you're standing here and you're tilting the board." Of course, making a new game also means taking the chance to improve on the past formula. "I wanted to simplify the tricks, I didn't really like the trick system in *1080°*," Giles admits. "It was a very Eighties, arcade button mashing type thing and I wanted to make it more natural."

One of the odd things about doing snowboarding in VR is that although the board is controlled with your feet in real life, you're reliant on your hands in the game. We wondered if that posed any problems when creating a control scheme that felt natural. "I'd like to say yes, but actually no," says Giles. "We did try attaching sensors to our legs and stuff like that, which seems like it should work but it doesn't really, because when you're going down a slope or turning, or stuff like that, you have lots of G-forces acting that you don't have when you're stationary. So you can't do all the things you can in real-life snowboarding when just standing up, you have to actually be moving – it just doesn't translate, you can't have things attached to your legs and pretend you're suddenly snowboarding. So we figured out quite quickly that that wasn't going to work. I just tried it with the hands and for some reason it felt right," he explains. "Most of the time when you're controlling your snowboard, you're actually using your upper body to turn, because you turn your shoulders and everything else follows through. So if you just hold the controllers naturally and turn, it just feels natural. After a while, you forget that you're controlling it with your arms." In fact, standing up isn't even necessary, according to Giles. "One of the best ways of playing it is actually sitting down in a swivel chair. I'd say most of the development was done like that."

> "So if you just hold the controllers naturally and turn, it just feels natural. After a while, you forget that you're controlling it with your arms"
> **Giles Goddard**

Since *Carve Snowboarding* was released earlier in the year, one common piece of feedback has been that the game has a steep learning curve. What advice would help new players who pick the game up after reading this? "What a lot of people aren't realising is that to get the high scores, you have to continuously be doing combos, preferably off a rail because you get a higher score doing that," says Giles. "You have to jump, trick, maybe do another trick and then quickly jump again to maintain the combo." But with strong reviews including scores of 4/5 from UploadVR and VR Focus, it might just be worth braving that difficulty curve to enjoy *Carve Snowboarding*.

CARVING OTHER SLOPES

What's next for Carve Snowboarding?

With the modern era of downloadable patches for all platforms, few games ever finish development once they're released, and Chuhai Labs has updated *Carve Snowboarding* a number of times since it launched earlier in 2021. These have mostly been small improvements to the overall experience – new leaderboards, difficulty tweaks, bug fixes and performance improvements for users of the Oculus Quest 2 have all been seen in the patch notes so far.

But what about those of us without the Quest hardware? With Giles having already spoken about potential strangulation, would it be safe to say that we won't be seeing versions of the game for wired headsets? "It's probably not that much of a problem now that we've figured out what actually matters in the game," says Giles. "The original plan was to let people jump up and spin around and do whatever they want, but realistically people don't do that. I mean it's great to be able to do that, but 99% of the time you're not doing that. It still works just as well wired, so we're planning on a Rift version and hopefully a PlayStation VR version, and other platforms." We look forward to hopefully seeing them soon.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

YAKUZA

GAMES GREW UP IN THE NOUGHTIES IN FAVOUR OF GUNS, GANGSTERS AND GORE. SEGA WOULD FOLLOW THIS TREND, EXCEPT SQUARELY AIMED AT A JAPANESE AUDIENCE. JOIN US ON THE STREETS OF KAMUROCHO TO REVISIT THE BIRTH OF A YAKUZA LEGEND

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

For most of the early years of the new millennium, Sega was adjusting to life as a third-party developer and publisher. It started by bringing its Dreamcast library to other platforms, and even developed a few new titles, such as Sonic Team's *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* on GameCube, or revived classic IPs such as *Shinobi* on PS2 and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* for Xbox. These were all however one-offs that failed to make a real splash in the market, and having exited the console business after five years of financial losses, Sega still found itself in the red. It needed a hit.

» [PS2] Japan's iconic bargain chain store is basically the Pound Shop but with a catchy jingle.

Of course, it wasn't the only Japanese company struggling at the time. The Noughties saw the rise of Western studios, as developers who were used to developing for PC made the move to more powerful consoles, while tastes shifted towards gritty realism aimed at a more mature audience, and these blockbusters were hardly cheap to make. In order to stay competitive, many of Japan's leading game companies would merge during this time, including Square and Enix, Bandai and Namco, as well as Sega with pachinko and pachislot developer Sammy in 2004. It was from this new era that *Yakuza* – or *Ryu Ga Gotoku* as it's known in Japan – came to be.

Yet a completely new and expensive project was also a huge risk – reportedly rejected by both Nintendo and Microsoft – not least because it was unlike anything producer Toshihiro Nagoshi had been known for, his previous division Amusement Vision having released colourful, arcade-based, family-friendly fare like *Super Monkey Ball, Virtua Striker 3* and *F-Zero GX*. For *Yakuza* however, he made a conscious effort to narrow in on one specific target audience – the Japanese male adult gamer – setting the game in modern-day Tokyo in its most popular and seedy red light district Kamurocho (modelled heavily on the real Kabukicho in the Shinjuku district) with an emotional and dramatic story of hot-blooded men, taking inspiration from yakuza television dramas with a script penned by Hase Seishu, a Japanese novelist well-known for yakuza crime novels.

To say that *Yakuza* was completely out of Sega's wheelhouse or simply an attempt to ape the success of *Grand Theft Auto* would however be incorrect, as the game's brawling combat is reminiscent of Nagoshi's 1998 3D arcade beat-'em-up *SpikeOut*, itself taking inspiration from

» [PS2] If we saw a guy running around with a nine-year-old in a red light district, we'd be asking questions too.

» [PS2] Although *Shenmue* popularised QTEs in cutscenes, *Yakuza* uses them much more during fights.

YA

"IT WAS UNLIKE ANYTHING PRODUCER TOSHIHIRO NAGOSHI HAD BEEN KNOWN FOR"

[PS2] Interactions with hostesses are fairly light, but it's the food and drink prices that'll leave you broke.

YAKUZA ON THE BIG SCREEN

CONTROVERSIAL DIRECTOR TAKASHI MIIKE PLAYS IT SAFE

Named after the game's Japanese title, *Like A Dragon: The Movie* was released in 2007 in Japan as a loose adaptation of the first *Yakuza* game, albeit condensed into one night in Kamurocho during a heatwave. It also throws in some new bizarre subplots for the film, including a bank robbery led by two rather clueless masked gunmen and a young couple who also turn to armed robbery seemingly for kicks.

While Takashi Miike is both a prolific and internationally acclaimed director and no stranger to yakuza flicks, best known for the controversial ultra-violent *Ichi The Killer* and *Audition*, this film is a comparably tame affair, often just going through the motions of reenacting scenes from the game with none of the emotional drama. Kiryu's actor Kazuki Kitamura also looks far too young for the role, looking more like he's cosplaying the signature grey suit and red shirt, although Goro Kishitani has a blast stealing the show as the psychotic Majima.

More interesting was an original drama made in 2006 – released on Sega's European website as four downloadable episodes – which served as a kind of prologue to the game, depicting Kiryu, Nishiki and Yumi's childhood at the Sunflower Orphanage. With a new movie in the works, involving two US production companies, 1212 Entertainment and Wild Sheep Content, it looks like *Yakuza* will get another shot on the big screen, though someone should tell Sega that Netflix is where the franchise would be right at home as a television series.

> "IT'S THIS KIND OF ATTENTION TO DETAIL THAT GAVE YAKUZA A CERTAIN APPEAL OVER ITS WESTERN CONTEMPORARIES"

YA-CRUISING FOR

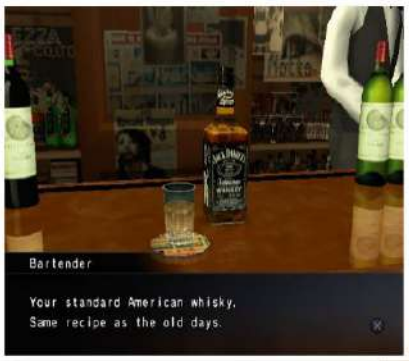
KAZUMA KIRYU

A fearsome yakuza enforcer who's known as the Dragon Of Dojima, Kazuma is on the verge of starting his own yakuza family until he takes the fall for his sworn brother Nishiki for killing his patriarch. Stoic, honour-bound yakuza like him are a rare breed, all the more so after being locked up for ten years.

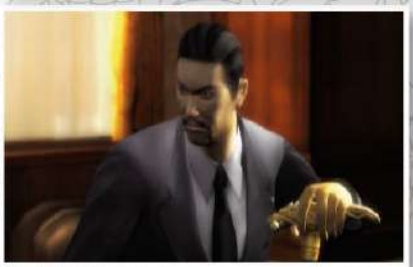
AKIRA NISHIKIYAMA

Known as Nishiki for short, he's Kiryu's sworn brother in the Dojima family. He has a tattoo of a koi on his back – alluding to a Japanese myth of a koi who becomes a dragon after swimming up a waterfall – representing his ambitions to climb the ranks of the Tojo Clan, though he does it through cold-blooded means.

» [PS2] A highlight of strolling into a convenience store is browsing the magazine section – it's all about the little details.



» [PS2] Using brands in games isn't new to Sega but there was even greater emphasis in *Yakuza* to best reflect real life.



the Mega Drive's *Streets Of Rage series*, where you could also grab objects in the environment to use as weapons. Attempts to portray Japanese culture in games had also been seen in the Dreamcast era, notably *Shenmue* (which Nagoshi also worked on as a supervisor) and *Jet Set Radio*, whose artist Ryuta Ueda served as Yakuza's game director. Nonetheless, prioritising a Japanese audience meant being able to include content and brands they were already familiar with. Strip clubs (or, more notoriously, the prostitutes in *Grand Theft Auto*) were already becoming a default addition to 'mature' games, but paying to spend time drinking and chatting up a hostess at cabaret clubs as a side activity would have been completely foreign to a Western player – and it was an aspect the team researched extensively by also attending these clubs themselves.

It's this kind of attention to detail that gave *Yakuza* a certain appeal over its Western contemporaries. It's true that Kamurocho is a comparably tiny open world, and hardly a seamless one, as it's impossible to explore on foot without the game noticeably freezing for a couple seconds before loading the next street, which was also displayed from largely fixed camera angles. Other aspects also had to be broken up, such as the many cinematic cutscenes (albeit rendered in-engine) while the battles also loaded into separate mini arenas akin to random encounters in an RPG – which it technically was since you would also use the experience gained from these battles to level up to learn new moves.

Yet despite these limitations, this city felt like a real place that reflected real life. It had bustling crowds of salary men, barkers and pleasure seekers, not to mention all the shopkeepers and restaurant staff of businesses you could patronise – rather than just a virtual playground giving you licence to cause wanton chaos. Of course, there's a heavily authored story it's telling that gradually immerses you in a complex web of yakuza politics and rivalries, but you can also just take a load off taking in the accurately recreated convenience stores

A BRUISING

MEET THE CAST OF YAKUZA

YUMI SAWAMURA

A close childhood friend of both Kazuma and Nishiki, although Yumi's long harboured feelings for the former. The game's story truly kicks off when she's kidnapped by their patriarch Dojima who tries to force himself on her. After the incident however, Yumi disappears, the trauma also causing her to lose her memory.

HARUKA SAWAMURA

For a nine-year-old girl, Haruka is calm and headstrong, seemingly unworried about wandering into a seedy part of town all by herself. That said, once she meets up with Kazuma, trouble seems to find her as she gets kidnapped multiple times, all while she's trying to find her mother Mizuki, apparently Yumi's younger sister.

MAKO DATE

A police detective who goes above and beyond for justice, even if it means going against the powers that be or at the expense of his family's own wellbeing. He's the only cop who doesn't believe in Kazuma's guilt, only to find himself teaming up with the ex-yakuza ten years later as he investigates the Tojo Clan's missing ten billion yen.

SHINTARO FUMA

Captain of the Dojima family, Fuma has a reputation as a ruthless killer, and was once the Tojo Clan's number one hitman. He's also Kazuma and Nishiki's paternal figure, as the proprietor of the orphanage they grew up in, though he evidently favours Kazuma, still helping him once he gets out of prison.

THINGS TO DO IN KAMUROCHO

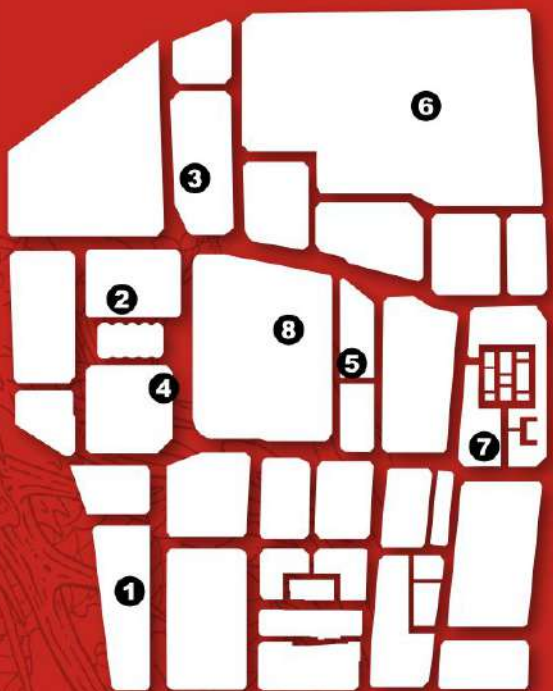
TRY OUT THESE ACTIVITIES

HANG OUT IN SERENA

1 Kazuma's haunt for knocking back a few, seen early on when he joins Nishiki and Yumi for drinks. Serena becomes your hideout where you can rewatch cutscenes and save the game. Mind, it's not totally safe, as you'll find yourself getting ambushed there at one point.

HIT THE ARCADE

2 There are actually two Club Sega arcades in Kamurocho, but the one on Theater Square gets a substantial expansion in future instalments. While there's a *Virtua Fighter 4* cabinet, it's sadly not playable. Instead, you can attempt the annoyingly difficult UFO Catcher.



PURGATORIAL CAGE FIGHTING

6 West Park (ironically located North East of the map) is populated by the city's homeless, but it hides an underground pleasure den called Purgatory, home to brothels, casinos, as well as a deadly cage fighting arena where Kazuma must prove his mettle.

OOH, AH, SHANGRI-LA

7 A members-only soapland for the rich and powerful, which can run you a million yen in a visit, it also becomes the site of another showdown with Majima, who decides to make a grand entrance by ramming a dump truck through the front door.

HIT SOME HOME RUNS

3 Batter up at the Yoshida Batting Center and try to hit as many homeruns from easy to extra hard modes. The batting centre is incidentally a hangout spot for Kazuma's rival Majima who kidnaps Haruka in order to lure him out for a showdown.

GET LUCKY SLOTTING

4 Volcano isn't the only gambling spot in town but its big neon sign near Theater Square makes it the hardest to miss. You can play the slots in exchange for prizes, such as power-ups, gifts for hostesses, or plates you can pawn for cash.

BACCHUS BLOODBATH

5 There's many places you can go for a drink in Kamurocho, but Bacchus is not one of them, as Kazuma finds the place, its owner and customers have been all shot up in a massacre. It's also where he first meets Haruka, frightened and hiding in a corner clutching a gun.

MILLENNIUM SHOWDOWN

8 Built during Kazuma's time in prison, the Millennium Tower is the tallest building in the centre of Kamurocho where the top floor is the site of a bar called Ares where Mizuki apparently works. The tower itself becomes a regular place for climatic showdowns in the series.

» [PS2] What makes Kazuma more likeable than any other gangster character in games? Saving a dog, of course.

or spend your yen on various minigames around the city, or sometimes find yourself bumping into a local that sparks a peculiar sidequest. Not that *Yakuza* had much trouble shifting from realistic drama to more over-the-top antics, especially as its combat included dramatic QTEs and even a car chase shootout that feels like a nod to lightgun arcade classic *Virtua Cop*.

What also set *Yakuza* apart was that it had plenty of character, and that's not including the large cast of characters, with those from the underworld receiving the game's trademark name and rank introduction. Kazuma Kiryu is unique to other adult protagonists of the time in that he's actually likeable. He may be part of a criminal organisation, but he's no angsty anti-hero or an avatar the player can choose to be good or bad – he's a rather simple but honourable guy who will protect those more vulnerable, and even though the combat can let you get carried away with shooting or stabbing enemies, he never canonically kills anyone. In fact, most fights usually end with the poor fools bruised, battered and apologising for causing trouble while also handing over some much-needed funds.

Despite making a game specifically for the Japanese market, Sega nonetheless made a strong effort to localise *Yakuza* for the West, even hiring known Hollywood talent in the voice cast, including Michael Madsen, Eliza Dushku and Mark Hamill as the voice of Kazuma's sadistic rival brother Goro Majima. Of course, in trying to dub

a game with such an explicit Japanese setting, something always felt lost in translation, while technical limitations meant there wasn't enough disc space to include both English and Japanese audio in the game (although crowd noises are still in Japanese while shop staff also greet you with "Irasshai!"). Not helping matters, an early trailer of the English version also made use of a rough unfinished soundtrack, giving fans the impression that this was a low-quality dub. By the time the game arrived in the West, a year after its Japanese launch, it also looked considerably dated on PS2, especially as Xbox 360 had ushered in the HD era.

The fact that *Yakuza* flopped in the West ultimately didn't matter to Sega since it was always prioritised as a Japanese release, and in that respect it was a huge success, selling one million units in Japan, with a sequel released the following year. Indeed, *Yakuza*'s popularity in its native country made it the equivalent of *Call Of Duty* or *FIFA*, with a new game releasing on a near-annual basis. Fortunately, a reboot campaign in recent years, thanks to prequel *Yakuza 0* and a remake of the first game has allowed *Yakuza* to get another shot at capturing the attention of the West, which has also been much happier to embrace Japanese culture and media than 15 years ago. Which pleases us, as *Yakuza* is a game that every gamer should experience.

» [PS2] The story occasionally takes place in other locations outside of Kamurocho, such as the Tojo Clan's HQ.

REMAKING YAKUZA

A DEFINITIVE REMAKE FOR FANS NEW AND OLD

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the series, *Yakuza Kiwami* was a remake of the first game from the ground up using the same engine for *Yakuza 0*, an enhanced version of the engine used for *Yakuza 5*. Besides faithfully retelling the story with enhanced photorealistic graphics, character models and re-recorded dialogue (for longtime fans in the West, this would also be the first time they could experience *Yakuza*'s story in its original Japanese audio), it also introduces a whole lot more content.

In the core story, we get flashbacks that better show Nishiki's arc as he steps out of Kiryu's shadow for the worse, transforming from meek sworn brother to murderous arch nemesis. Better still, it was an excuse for the writing team (bolstered by fantastic localisation work from JRPG developer Atlus, acquired by Sega a few years prior) to add more zany sidequests that the series has been better known for in more recent entries. In particular is fan favourite Majima, whose new 'Majima Everywhere' feature sees the Mad Dog popping up in various places and disguises to help Kiryu strengthen up – the conceit being that he's out of shape after a decade in the slammer. It's also technically more of a direct sequel to the Eighties-set *Yakuza 0*, as Kiryu inherits the prequel's fighting style-switching system, while the two games also make other callbacks to each other, such as the Pocket Circuit minigame.

Kiwami released in 2016 in Japan for both PS3 and PS4, but by the time it was localised the following year, it was kept to just PS4, while ports to PC and Xbox One followed in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Now that the whole mainline series is on Xbox Game Pass, there's never been a better way for newcomers to experience Sega's excellent series.

235500
SAKURA
I-SM Lv.05
MIN
CHARGE
MAX
MAX
GO

Street Fighter Alpha 3

IT'S IK+ ON STEROIDS

» DREAMCAST » 1999 » CAPCOM

As much as I loved *Street Fighter Zero 3* on the Saturn, its best game mode, World Tour, was an absolute pain to play due to featuring so much Japanese. I struggled through it as the fighting was so solid, but I eventually hit a brick wall and sold my copy on because I felt I was missing out – it's obviously skyrocketed in price now. Silly me.

Needless to say, when I discovered that Capcom's brawler was heading to Dreamcast and would actually get a Western port I was only too keen to pick it up and I'm bloody glad I did, because even though *Street Fighter Alpha 3* is stuffed to the brim with extra game modes beyond the arcade game, World Tour is quite simply excellent and easily worth the price of admission alone.

It effectively consists of lots of little scraps across the world, but many of the fights come with specific requirements, so one minute you'll be dealing with a character that can only be defeated with special moves, the next you'll have to deal with someone that has rapidly replenishing health. While you play you can level up your character across three ISMs and also pick up new abilities that offer you bonuses, from automatically blocking incoming attacks to being less susceptible to becoming dizzy (this is where I bounced off the Saturn version as too much wasn't explained).

For me though, the standout fights are the Dramatic Battles, which either feature you and a computer controlled assistant teaming up against a suitably powerful enemy or your lone warrior taking on a pair of badasses and it's terrific fun. It reminds me of the excellent fights in *IK+*, but here the action is ramped up to 11 thanks to the inclusion of more varied opponents and spectacular special moves. It can feel like you're being overwhelmed at times, but it's also oh so satisfying when you finally beat them. As you might expect, after recently returning to Sega's console, *Street Fighter Alpha 3* has had more play than anything else.

>> This month we get to enjoy a brand-new Dreamcast game, return to the gloomy corridors of Quake and find out if Nintendo's latest WarioWare release is worth the cash

»[Dreamcast] Standard platform game elements like this red spring are common, but are used well.

» [Dreamcast] This boss is quite cool, as you have to prevent the leviathan from sinking your boat as you fight.

Intrepid Izzy

BOLDLY EXPLORING UNCHARTED DREAMCAST TERRITORY

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED** DREAMCAST
- **ALSO ON:** PC, PS4
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW (DC/PC), TBA (PS4)
- **PRICE:** £14.99 (PC), £29.99 (DREAMCAST)
- **PUBLISHER:** WAVE GAME STUDIOS
- **DEVELOPER:** SENILE TEAM
- **PLAYERS:** 1

Being a fan of the Dreamcast has certainly had its ups and downs. There was the successful launch that indicated that Sega might have finally turned things around, the crushing disappointment of the console's discontinuation less than two years later, and a weird but exciting afterlife marked by import treats like *Ikaruga* and *Under Defeat*. When the official releases finally did stop in 2007, independent developers stepped in with high-quality commercial games like *Wind & Water: Puzzle Battles*, *Sturmwind* and *Xenocider*. *Intrepid Izzy* is the latest game to carry forward the Dreamcast's legacy, and we're happy to report that it's another really solid entry in the console's improbably expanding library.

Having accidentally released a genie on her adventures, our protagonist Izzy has to go and stop him from causing chaos. That's not loads of set-up, but the game doesn't really need much. Your job is to guide Izzy through a series of interconnected non-linear stages, beating up baddies and bosses while solving puzzles to open new pathways. Often, these will involve Izzy's magical powers, which are initially limited to *Street Fighter*-style fireballs, but can be expanded by collecting various outfits during the course of the adventure. These include a flying-squirrel suit that allows her to glide or perform a downward drill

» Senile Team is a mainstay of the posthumous Dreamcast development scene, having first impressed with *Beats Of Rage* way back in 2003. The team moved into commercial development with *Rush Rush Rally Racing* in 2009, and ported it to the Wii in 2012. The updated *Rush Rush Rally Reloaded* came to Dreamcast in 2017, and the Kickstarter for *Intrepid Izzy* concluded in October of that year, raising €36,367 from 413 backers. The game has been long-awaited by fans of Sega's final console, as it was originally projected for release in November 2018 and released for PC in July 2020.

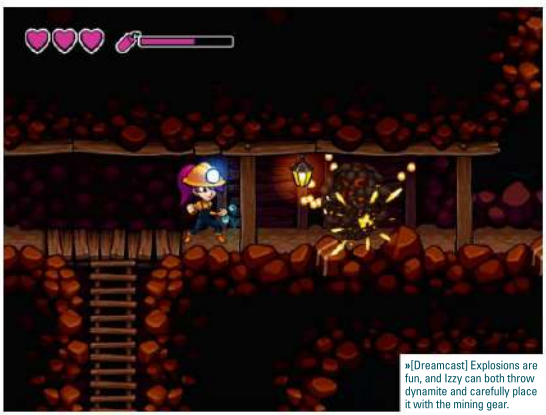
»[Dreamcast] Awesometown is where you'll come to heal up, change outfits and buy items.

»[Dreamcast] Yes, it's the mine-cart ride! This section is quite hard but doesn't last too long.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN
Quake
This sensational FPS still holds up brilliantly and this new version has plenty of great improvements to make it even better.

NICK
Intrepid Izzy
Any new Dreamcast game will always get my attention and I've been really pleased with Senile Team's entertaining platformer this month.



»[Dreamcast] Explosions are fun, and Izzy can both throw dynamite and carefully place it with the mining gear.

» [Dreamcast] Boss battles are definitely the most visually striking parts of the game.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

▼ SOMETHING NEW
MONSTER BOY & THE CURSED KINGDOM

» [Dreamcast] We'd hate to get elbow dropped by anything, and but a minotaur seems really bad.

kick, and mining gear that allows her to throw around sticks of dynamite. So yes, it's firmly in Metroidvania territory.

That's not a bad thing, mind. The style has grown so popular because it's often compelling, and this proves to be the case with *Intrepid Izzy*. The level layouts are interesting and rather large, with plenty of secrets for the observant gamer to spot, and even cool sections like a mine-cart ride. Your various fighting moves are easy to perform and ensure that combat is always satisfying, though we could have done with fewer rooms that lock you in for a fight with waves of regular baddies. Getting from place to place is easy thanks to a network of warp doors, which is particularly useful when you pick up a new outfit and remember an area where you think your new powers will be useful. If you fancy a break from the main game, you can spend the coins you earn from defeated enemies to play some cool arcade minigames in the Awesometown hub area. The dialogue is limited, but what's there is pretty funny at times.

The challenge here has been very well crafted. The boss battles offer a good amount of variation from one another, and can be quite tricky – at one point we got demolished by a skeletal warrior and initially wondered how the heck we were expected to get past it, before figuring out its pattern. You definitely gain a sense of accomplishment from overcoming them, and that's despite the fact that you have unlimited lives. Better yet, checkpoints are intelligently placed near potentially troublesome spots, further reducing the frustration factor when you do cop it. If you do find yourself struggling, the restaurant in Awesometown sells items that will replenish your health, boost your attack power and more. Of course, you might also find that simply changing your outfit helps in some situations.

The artwork takes full advantage of the Dreamcast's 640x480 resolution, ensuring that characters and environments don't look quite so much like pixel art. The animation is particularly impressive, with smooth motions for both Izzy and her adversaries. Background art can be excellent, particularly in the boss arenas, but in regular stages it is often competent but slightly repetitive over large stages. Fortunately, the game incorporates a good map and objectives screen that ensures you won't become lost as a result, and there are a good number of stage themes. The music is all well-composed with standout tracks including the tunes for Chocolate Mines and boss battles. For some reason, the theme for Aztec Greece reminds us of Amiga games.

The only complaint we have concerns the game's handling of video output. *Intrepid Izzy* is region-free, and will boot at 60Hz on an NTSC Dreamcast. However, there's no option to choose 60Hz on a PAL Dreamcast, so the game will run at 50Hz – unless you happen to be using a VGA cable. We ran a comparison and were pleasantly surprised to find that Senile Team has ensured that the gameplay speed is properly adjusted at 50Hz, so you'll only notice some borders at the top and bottom of the screen, but it would have been nice to have the option all the same.

Intrepid Izzy is a very good Metroidvania, and every aspect of the game is definitely well constructed. There are plenty of 2D Metroidvanias new and old available on current platforms, and it isn't quite at the top of what the genre has to offer as a whole, but the genre was somewhat out of fashion during the Dreamcast's heyday and there are few alternatives on the platform. That's what makes *Intrepid Izzy* so vital – it's not only very good in its own right, but actively fills a gap in the console's library. ✱

In a nutshell

Senile Team's run of quality games continues, as *Intrepid Izzy* immediately joins the ranks of top tier independent Dreamcast releases. With so few options for quality Metroidvanias on the console, this should easily appeal to any fan of the genre.

>> Score **83%**

PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade: Codemasters Collection 1

» **System:** Evercade » **Buy it from:** Retail » **Buy it for:** £14.99

We've had our eye on this cart ever since it was first announced and it certainly doesn't disappoint. Released alongside *Mega Cat Studios Collection 2* (reviewed next issue) it's another excellent addition to the Evercade range thanks to its solid set of games.

The presentation is just how you'd expect with the usual frontend menus and control options for Mega Drive games. A nice color manual is included, although 17 games means titles like *Mega-Lo-Mania* are harder to understand with no prior knowledge. Emulation is to the usual quality, although we did notice distortion occasionally on *Psycho Pinball* and *Sensible Soccer*.

Ironically, the Codemasters-owned Sensible Software releases make the biggest impact. *Sensible Soccer* is still brilliant, *Mega-Lo-Mania* is a solid strategy game, while Cannon Fodder is a timeless strategy shooter. The other included Mega Drive games are the challenging racer *Super Skidmarks*, *Tennis All Stars* (essentially *Pete Sampras Tennis* without the licence), *Cosmic Spacehead* and the rather wonderful *Psycho Pinball*.

The remaining ten games all originated on the NES and they're more of a mixed bag. *Stunt Buggies* is an enjoyable take on the top-down maze genre, while *Boomerang Kid* is a challenging puzzle platformer that requires you to collect boomerangs before you can exit the stage. *Linus Spacehead*, *Big Nose Freaks Out*, *Big Nose The Caveman* and *CJ's Elephant Antics* are average platformers, while *The Ultimate Stuntman* is a chaotic action game that riffs off numerous arcade classics.

The final three, *Bee 52*, *F-16 Renegade* and *Mig 29: Soviet Fighter* are all shoot-'em-ups, but if we're honest, only *F-16 Renegade* held our interest. The 16-bit games are clearly stronger than their 8-bit counterparts, but there's more than enough great titles here to justify the paltry asking price.

>> Score **86%**

»[Evercade] It's certainly not easy, but *Super Skidmarks* is still great fun.

»[Evercade] We've enjoyed *Boomerang Kid* and it's one of the stronger NES titles.

WarioWare: Get It Together!

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it from:** Online, retail
» **Buy it for:** £39.99

This new sequel from Intelligent Systems cleverly evolves the core *WarioWare* gameplay while ensuring the minigames remain fresh and hectic. The key difference with G*et It Together!* is that Wario and his friends are now playable and they all have unique moves. Each new level lets you take a certain number of Wario's mates into a stage and then you just have to complete the mad minigames as normal as you switch between them.

While the main Story mode is rather brief, there's plenty of longevity thanks to an entertaining set of multiplayer-focused games and the ability to set new scores on the 200+ minigames. Overall, a tremendous package that we've found very hard to put down.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **83%**

Polybius Quarter Arcade Cabinet Charger

» **Buy it from:** numskull.com
» **Buy it for:** £119.99

The latest arcade cabinet from Numskull Designs is different to its previous cabs. It's not a game at all, but rather a charging hub designed to power up to ten of your Quarter Arcade cabinets (we were able to test four).

As you'd expect from the range, the cabinet is well made and designed to fit in with your existing cabinets with a distinctive backlit marquee and artwork based on what the fabled game was rumoured to look like as well as a universal plug. The screen displays a rolling demo of the infamous game along with sinister sound effects which fits well with the conspiracy-fuelled rumours that surround *Polybius*. It's certainly expensive for what it is, but if you have a number of Quarter Arcade cabs already you may want to add this to your collection.

DARRAN JONES

Quake

» **System:** Xbox Series X/S (tested), PC, PS4, PS5, Switch » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £7.99

id Software's acclaimed FPS receives a truly stunning remaster by Nightdive Studios. This is a sensational port particularly on Nintendo's Switch, running at a blistering framerate and packed with a huge number of extras, including all the original expansion packs, a new campaign by MachineGames, cross-play multiplayer and even mod support. Nightdive Studios has added all sorts of extra options as well, meaning you can enjoy the game however you like, including 4K options on systems like the PC and Xbox Series X. Perhaps the most staggering aspect of Nightdive Studios' remaster is just how cheap it is, something which should hopefully ensure that this incredible classic gets enjoyed by as many new gamers as possible.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **95%**

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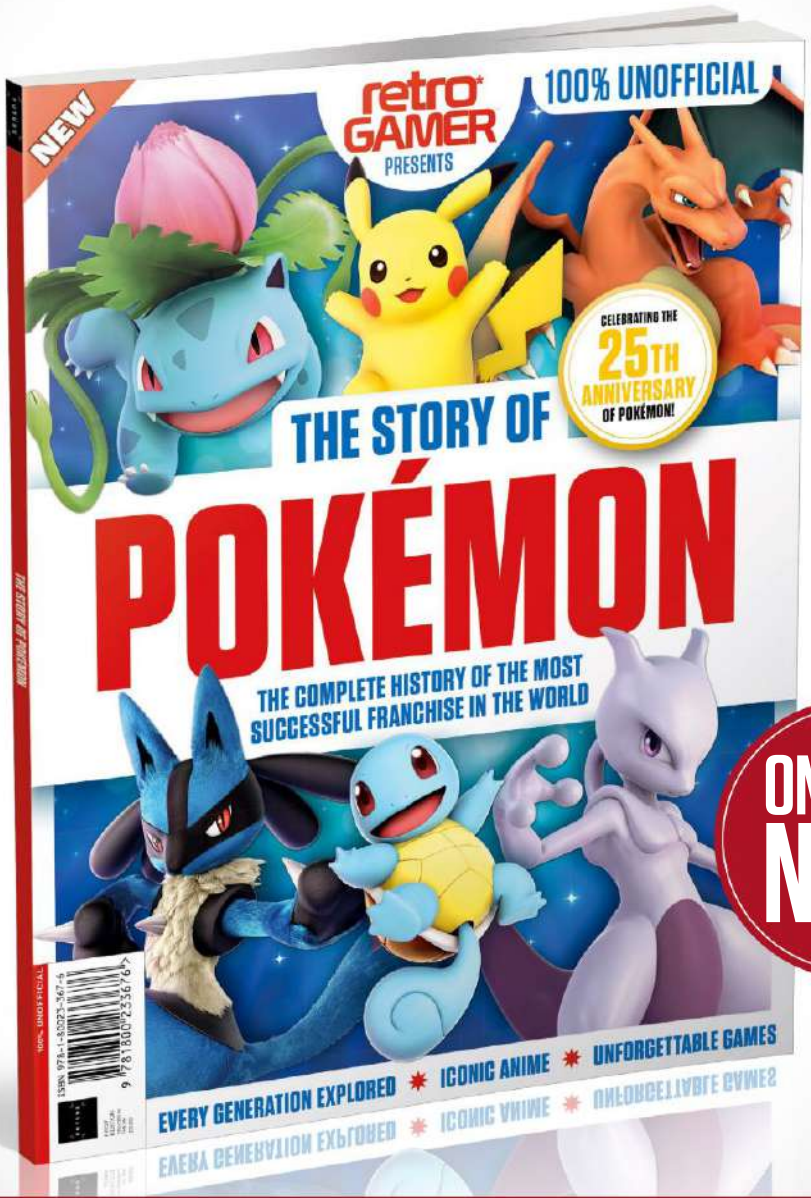
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HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

PLUG IN THE MULTITAP

What are the team's favourite multiplayer games?

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

While games are great fun, they can become even more enjoyable when played with friends – providing of course, no fierce rivalries break out. Nick, Darran and Tim recall some of their favourite multiplayer experiences from over the years, but will they all remain friends afterwards?

DARRAN
With *Super Monkey Ball* on the cover it seems a good time to discuss everyone's favourite multiplayer and party games.

NICK
I've heard *Mario Kart* is pretty good. I meet up with friends from a *Sonic* forum frequently, and we never miss a session on whichever handheld one is out at the time.

TIM
I bought the multitap for *Mega Bomberman* on the Mega Drive so my friends could all play. Unfortunately for them I only had third-party controllers. I kept the original one for myself.

DARRAN
Both games are a very good shout. Aside from *Worms* on Xbox Live Arcade, the best multiplayer game I've ever experienced is 16-player *Halo* on the original Xbox before the Live servers kicked in.

» [Mega Drive] That sponge gets overcrowded, creating a game within a game.

NICK
That's an impressive session to get together. You must have had a pretty good LAN system in place?

DARRAN
Basically I had three mates and me on my big 28-inch main TV and a smaller portable 15-inch TV with four people on it. The big table in my front room had two 22-inch TVs side by side with four people on each side of the table. We'd play every Saturday night for months until Mel chucked us all out.

NICK
Wow! That room's a good size, but even then that's got to have been cramped.

TIM
And ridiculously hot.

DARRAN
And smelly! In fact that's part of the reason we got chucked out! While we're on the subject of first-person shooters, does anyone else have any personal highlights from the genre?

NICK
Whenever I actually managed to keep my lunch in my stomach while playing one, I considered it a pretty proud achievement.

TIM
Well done. I did get into *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* back in 2010. I thought I was getting good at it, but I really wasn't.

DARRAN
Modern Warfare 2? Isn't that the one where you have the sniper stage and you crawl through a field?

TIM
Yeah, that's the one.

DARRAN
Ah, I remember enjoying that. So when you play multiplayer games do you play for the genuine fun of competing with your friends or do you play so you can trash them into insignificant balls of nothing and cry at their misfortune?

» [GameCube] The *Monkey Ball* series has plenty of great minigames, but Nick is happy to play the standard games with friends too.

> "I think it all ended in tears by the time we got to Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike and the Darran Jones Factor™ was unleashed"
>
> **NICK**

TIM
I'm usually the insignificant ball of nothing crying at my misfortune.

NICK
That entirely depends on what I'm playing, really. Something like *Chu Chu Rocket* is so chaotic that I don't go in with any expectation of winning, but something like *Puyo Puyo Tetris*? There's a reason that the multiplayer games of that stopped happening after a while.

DARRAN
I tend to find I get super competitive and a nasty side of me comes out, which is weird because I'm normally so polite and placid. I definitely remember things getting quite heated when we played *Micro Machines*. Do you remember that, Nick?

NICK
I sure do. Four of us huddled around the Mega Drive in your shed, each trying to shove one another off the sponge ferry and into the sink.

DARRAN
There was a lot of swearing that night!

NICK
I think it all ended in tears by the time we got to *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and the Darran Jones Factor™ was unleashed.

TIM
The Darran Jones Factor™ was the bane of my life when we used to play in the office. Alex vs Hugo, classic match-up.

DARRAN
Ah we had some good times playing that in the office at lunchtimes. I don't always land those specials, but when I do you better fucking watch out. Lol.

NICK
Speaking of fighting, *Power Stone* went down so well in my house at uni that my housemate bought me *Power Stone 2*, just so that we could have four-player matches.

Follow us online so that you can join in the discussions

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

»[N64] We've lost hours to *GoldenEye*, it's a tremendous game whether you're playing with friends or on your own.

DARRAN
Yup, I absolutely adored playing *Power Stone 1* and *2*, although I preferred the second one. The amount of fights we used to get into over it was crazy. Did you play it much, Tim?

TIM
Not as much as I'd have liked to (didn't have a Dreamcast) but I did play it a bit on the PSP collection. It's a great game.

DARRAN
It's always amazed me that it never got a release on Xbox Live Arcade. It would have been perfect. Speaking of perfect party games, did everyone else love Monkey Target as much as I did? That was another firm favourite at lunchtimes on *games™*.

NICK
I liked Monkey Target, but my friends and I actually played the main game in *Super Monkey Ball* more than we did the minigames.

TIM
Nope. Didn't play it enough. I was always playing *Micro Machines V4* with three others at lunchtimes. That was amazing! And we all had hilarious three-letter names: FUK, POO, FEK and, uh, GOG.

DARRAN
Micro Machines is a firm favourite, I've been playing it since the Mega Drive games. Were you ever part of the infamous *Ribbit King* tournaments, Tim? I never understood the appeal of that.

TIM
I was. Many of them. They were terribly drunken affairs put on after the pub. The highlight being going to Top on the second stage. And then falling asleep mid-swing…

DARRAN
Surely playing party games drunk is all part of the fun? I'd imagine Nick would have to get wrecked before he could enjoy *Sonic Battle*!

NICK
You'd need to give me a lot of whisky and at least £50 in cash, up front.

DARRAN
I think I'd rather do that than play *Fusion Frenzy* with you again. I got absolutely hammered. In fact, while I think about it, did anyone else like playing *Saturn Bomberman* because you could continue fucking up the other players by lobbing bombs at them after you died?

TIM
That's utterly vicious! I love it! Didn't have that on the Mega Drive game.

NICK
I love that. You get to bully the person who eliminated you.

DARRAN
See guys, I told you that I get needlessly competitive when I start playing games!

» [Mega Drive] It's not quite as vicious as *Saturn Bomberman*, but *Mega Bomberman* still has the capacity to test friendships.

» [Arcade] Darran plays with Hugo in *3rd Strike*. Why? Because he's the easiest way to unleash the Darran Jones Factor™.

» [Xbox] Darran can still remember when *Halo 2* was shown off networked to *games™*, it's the only time he didn't play its multiplayer online.

» [Arcade] Sometimes it's fun to play multiplayer games co-operatively and *Gauntlet* is a very good example.

READERS REACT

Here are just some of your favourite multiplayer games

WAVE Game Studios
Bomberman! Especially *Saturn Bomberman* with up to ten players.

ACO
Gauntlet Legends (N64) and its expanded port, *Dark Legacy* (PS2, GameCube). Just some mindless fun to play with my siblings growing up and a good stress reliever.

Pedro G
When it comes to multiplayer games, *GoldenEye* on the good old N64 will always be my golden choice.

Danny Russell
Death Tank Zwei, as friends always underestimate how fun and frantic it'll be. That theme tune too. Dare I say it... the best seven-player game out there!

Bryan Focht
I played *Just Dance* when the Wii first came out with my girlfriend (at the time) and now we are married and have kids.

Tom Turner
I enjoy playing the original *Streets Of Rage* with anyone, but for more than two, I adore *Worms* and *Hogs Of War*.

Sean
Quake, with the update especially, has become a ritual again. The crossplay has allowed a whole new generation to experience it too, which is beyond amazing.

Retro Prime
Super Tennis – still the best tennis game and most fun to play after all these years!

Alyxxis Sinclaire
Unreal Tournament 99 is a game I keep returning to for the awesome music, variety and simple fun. It also runs well on pretty much any PC.

Goggle Dave
Gauntlet. I loved the arcade setup with the four-player controls. A fantastic, sociable team game. Great fun.

Mansfieldinho
I'd always say *TMNT* or *The Simpsons* in our local bowling alley arcade or chip shop next to our school!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

NINJA GAIDEN MASTER NINJA TOURNAMENT BOKKEN

Tecmo ran a series of online tournaments for *Ninja Gaiden* across Japan, Europe and North America back in 2004. One of the prizes was a bokken, made and signed by former Team Ninja head, Tomonobu Itagaki.

PAID: £90

TIME CRISIS PRESS KIT

Sony published *Time Crisis* for the PlayStation in Europe and a gold-painted G-Con 45 is what they went with for a press kit. I got mine from the former editor of *PlayStation Pro* magazine.

PAID: £157

STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT PILOT TEST

Capcom distributed 100 of these beta discs in 2003 to test the online-only *Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact* on Xbox Live. I have two and they're both factory sealed.

PAID: NOTHING

BIO

NAME:
Matthew Edwards

LOCATION:
Sutton, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Street Fighter (series)

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
PlayStation 2

COLLECTION WORTH:
Somewhere in the five figure range

TWITTER:
@TheStreetWriter

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

Matthew Edwards walks us through his excellent collection

Some gamers are motivated to collect because of their love for a certain system or series. For Matthew Edwards, who currently works as a senior community and esports manager for Capcom UK, his own collection largely started because of the job he had in 2003. "I didn't really start collecting until I started working at Game," he tells us. "Seeing all the new and used games that flooded the stock room – in addition to having a steady income and a staff discount – motivated me to start collecting."

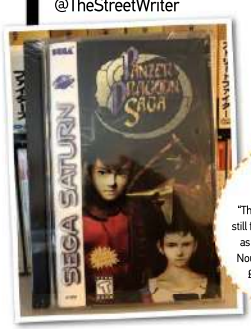
While Matthew started off with a Mega Drive, which he received when he was six, Sony's PlayStation 2 became the first console that he started focusing on. "I was an avid reader of *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* and later *games™*, and I picked up many PS2 games on launch if they reviewed well," he explains. "I also had the advantage of being able to swap an opened game for a sealed one after finishing it." It was during this period that Matthew also started collecting for the Saturn and he took particular interest in the console's impressive import scene. "I grabbed many of the 1MB and 4MB RAM cart boxsets," he recalls. "It was back when you could get almost two dollars to the pound. That's one thing I miss about the mid-Noughties. The exchange rate made importing games feel like a steal. It's definitely not like that anymore."

Although he did freelance writing from 2009 to 2014 for publications like *games™* and *Eurogamer*, his job at Capcom has allowed him to better focus on his collecting and also gives him an advantage when it comes to focusing on the games and franchises he loves. "I work closely with the licensing teams on brand approvals for the IPs I manage," he explains. "If I see something interesting like a vinyl boxset or character statue, I'll pick one up when they go on sale."

An even bigger perk is being credited for the games he's worked on which range from *Street Fighter V* to *Devil May Cry 5*. "That means a lot to me. Owning a rare piece of gaming history is one thing, but having my name appear in the games I love is something else. I wouldn't trade that for any collectible."

Due to working in Capcom's esports community, it should come as no surprise to learn that Matthew is a huge fighting fan, and as you'd expect they form a significant part of his collection. "Fighting games were the pinnacle of home console graphics and animation when I was growing up," he tells us. "That's what hooked me in initially." Knowing his interest in the genre, his love for the PS2 makes more sense. "It probably has more fighting games than any other system," he explains. "The *Neo Geo Online Collection* makes up 34 fighting games just by itself."

While he has everything from signed games and bizarre Capcom paraphernalia in his collection (including a gigantic skull to celebrate Capcom's *Monster Hunter* series) Matthew's latest obsession is picking up shop stands. "That harks back to my Game years," he admits. "Whenever a particularly striking standee arrived with some awesome looking artwork, all the staff wanted it. The best I managed to secure



PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

"The NTSC US version and it's still factory sealed. I saw it listed as part of a joblot in the late-Noughties. I offered the seller £100 and they accepted."

PAID: £100

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
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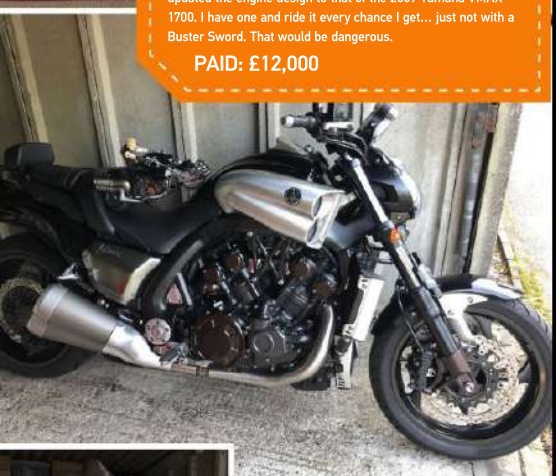
JEWEL IN THE CROWN

YAMAHA VMAX 1700

■ The Hardy-Daytona in the original *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) has an engine design copied from the 1985 Yamaha V-Max 1200. For the *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020), Square Enix updated the engine design to that of the 2009 Yamaha VMAX 1700. I have one and ride it every chance I get... just not with a Buster Sword. That would be dangerous.

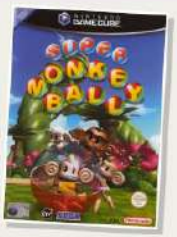
PAID: £12,000



back then was a *Wind Waker* standee that I still have to this day." It's not just standees that Matthew collects, as he'll largely go for any POS (point of sale) that focuses on his favourite genres. "A couple of years back, I also bagged two arcade location test banners used to promote *Street Fighter Alpha* and *Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge* back in 1995," he reveals. "The seller had previously auctioned a bunch of original arcade posters, but for some reason, they listed these banners for just £80 each. I pulled the trigger within 30 minutes of the listing going live. It's forgotten bits of gaming history like this that I'm most interested in."

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices



THE COVER STAR

SUPER MONKEY BALL

You can pick *Super Monkey Ball* up for peanuts, with most GameCube copies starting at **£6.** The Xbox and PS2 versions of *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* are even cheaper, starting at just **£2.**

NODES OF YESOD

While we've seen *Nodes* sell for as little as **£1.50,** its cardboard box iteration typically sells for **£15,** regardless of system.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

A complete PAL copy of Capcom's fighter sells between **£32** and **£60.** The Japanese version starts at **£30,** while the US release typically starts at **£70.**

CHUCKIE EGG

There's a lot of demand for the Spectrum version and it fetches as much as **£15.** Other versions seem less desirable and prices typically start at **£2-£3** and rarely go above **£10.**

YAKUZA

PAL prices for Sega's game start at **£6** and rarely top **£15** meaning you can jump in at the series' beginning for very little cost.

THEME PARK

Mega Drive and Amiga versions start at **£10,** PC starts at **£12** and CD32 opens at **£30.** SNES starts at **£20** complete, while the Jaguar version hits **£40.** You can get the Saturn and PlayStation versions for a few quid, while the FM Towns release is a few hundred.

DONALD IN MAUI MALLARD

The PAL Mega Drive release ranges from **£35** to **£70.** PAL SNES copies sell for around **£65,** while the US version can hit **£80.** We've seen the Japanese Super Famicom release reach as much as **£125.**

BARNSTORMING

Complete copies of this classic Activision game rarely top **£15** and if you're not fussed about a box you can buy it for even less.

HOW MUCH?!

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

The acclaimed Saturn game has always been expensive, but a recent charity auction saw it reaching new heights. Starting off at **£50,** the game eventually ended at **£902,** nearly **£400** more than what it typically goes for.

Prices correct at time of print

SHMUPS FOREVER

Why Darran will never get bored of the shoot-'em-up

My interest in the shoot-'em-up (or shmup) probably began like it did for many others with the introduction of *Space Invaders* in the late-Seventies. I can't remember the exact year I played it but I remember being mesmerised by those little blighters and becoming terrified once they started speeding up as my lone fighter decimated their forces. *Space Invaders*' impact was immense, not just on me but countless other gamers, and its success meant numerous rip-offs and sequels followed. I played every one I could.

For me the shmup is gaming in its purest, most distilled form. You can often play a good shmup on muscle memory alone and while they're often incredibly easy to understand and play they can be crushingly difficult to master – in my mind, few experiences are as satisfying as completing a tough shmup on a single credit. I see shmups as the pinnacle of exceptional game design, as it's often you against a relentless army of enemies and only your own reflexes will get you out of the incoming onslaught. Yes, many enemies in shoot-'em-ups do attack in strict patterns, particularly bosses, but it's wrong to assume that the genre is a strict memory test where simply remembering where things are will always assure you success. It doesn't.

Most of my early shoot-'em-up memories come from the arcades because that's where all the best advancements in the genre were made. It seemed like every week I'd visit Quay Amusements and discover something new, from the isometric viewpoint of *Zaxxon* to the icon-driven power-up system of *Gradius* and the movable option of *Prehistoric Isle*. There was always something exciting happening in the genre and while many shooters would make it to my beloved Amstrad they would often pale in comparison to their arcade parents.

As much as I loved the CPC it was pretty poor at replicating the fast-moving sprites and speedy scrolling you'd often find in arcade games, meaning I'd ignore many ports and simply concentrate on titles like *Jetpac* and *Starbike*, which were better suited to home systems of the time. It was at this point that I became extremely jealous of my friend Mark Elkins as he had a C64 with amazing shooters like *Armalyte*, *Katakis*, *Delta*, *Io* and countless others.

While I've always enjoyed those early shmups on home computers, my interest in the genre grew once I discovered consoles like the Master System, and later the Mega Drive, SNES and PC Engine. As astonishing as Bob Pape's conversion of *R-Type* was on the Spectrum, it couldn't compare to the PC Engine version (sorry Bob). In fact, the PC Engine became this coveted holy grail for me due to the silly number of shooters available on the system, from arcade blasters like *Gradius* and *P-47* to more esoteric shooters like *Coryoon*, *Gunhed* and *Air Zonk*. I wouldn't own the console until many years after its release and I soon hoovered up many of its best shooters. I've since sold my PC Engine because I'm an idiot and the cost of games now means it's too expensive to revisit. Oh well, at least I have the PC Engine Mini.

While the PC Engine was out of reach for years, I regularly rotated between the Mega Drive and SNES enjoying the likes of *Aero Blasters*, *Gynoug* and *Thunder Force III*, among many others on Sega's console, and *Super Aleste*, *R-Type III* and *Axelay* on Nintendo's machine. Yes I dabbled with the Amiga but I often found myself disappointed by acclaimed shooters like *Xenon 2* (too slow), *Project X* (too bland) and *Agony* (too clunky). Titles like *Apidya* impressed me, but I soon realised that it wasn't that I didn't like Amiga shooters, but that it was more where they originated from. Many Amiga shooters were made in the West and after spending years playing Japanese shooters in the arcades I began to see a huge gulf in the quality of games being released in both regions.

SHMUP HEAVEN

MY INGREDIENTS FOR THE PERFECT SHOOT-'EM-UP

SCORING MECHANICS
I love chasing high scores, so shooters with intrinsically deep scoring systems (like those by Cave) will always get a lot of play from me.

POWER-UPS
If you want to impress me make sure your shmup has some over-the-top weaponry. I'll be blasting for ages.

BIG BOSSES
There have been numerous bosses that have impressed me in shmups and I love destroying them almost as much as first encountering them.

KILLER MUSIC
While I'm not usually a fan of loud music I do like the heavy rock soundtracks that are found in many shooters. It really gets your adrenaline pumping.

ENGAGING LOCATIONS
Flying through space can get boring so games that add a little variety to their environmental design always get the thumbs-up from me.

SCORE<1> HI-SCORE SCORE<2>
0400 0000
[ARCADE] SPACE INVADERS LEFT A BIG IMPRESSION ON ME GROWING UP AND MY LOVE OF SHMUPS ONLY GREW.
[ARCADE] ROBOTRON: 2084 IS AN ARENA-BASED SHOOTER AND IT'S ONE OF THE FINEST YOU CAN EXPECT TO EVER PLAY.
[ZX SPECTRUM] HOME COMPUTERS OFTEN FAILED TO CAPTURE THE BRILLIANCE OF THE ARCADE ORIGINALS, BUT EFFORTS LIKE R-TYPE WERE AMAZING.

The hardware nature of consoles generally seemed to make them better suited for shooters and this became only more apparent once systems like the Saturn and PlayStation arrived. I've already spoken about my love for Sega's console, but it remains my favourite system for shmups as the quality of titles on Sega's machine remains astonishing, even today.

Shmups seemed to fall out of fashion during the PS2 era and while some absolute bangers can be found on Sony's console, as well as Sega's Dreamcast, it was obvious that publishers were beginning to lose faith in the genre. By the time the HD consoles arrived only small studios like Cave were forging a path and releasing full-price games at retail, and when titles did reach the West they would often be budget releases or simply turn up on digital stores.

Thank goodness then that there's been something of a revival in recent years with both the PS4 and Switch having incredible physical shmup libraries (PC and Xbox owners have plenty of great digital releases to enjoy). While it's likely that shmups will remain on the fringes of gaming for the time being, it's pleasing to see that a genre I've enjoyed for some 40 years still has plenty of life in it.

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS OF MY MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION INCLUDE THE EXCELLENT THUNDER FORCE III AND ELEMENTAL MASTER. THAT GLEYLANCER IS A BOOTLEG.
I HAVE GOT THE AMAZING EINHANDER, HONEST. FOR SOME REASON I LEFT IT ON MY SHELF WHEN I WAS GRABBING MY GAMES.
YOU'LL NEED STUPIDLY DEEP POCKETS IF YOU WANT TO OWN A COMPLETE LIBRARY OF SATURN SHMUPS. I'M PRETTY HAPPY WITH MY COLLECTION.
[PC] MANY MODERN SHMUPS LIKE CRIMSON CLOVER: WORLD IGNITION ARE EXCELLENT. I'M PUMPED IT IS NOW GETTING A PHYSICAL SWITCH RELEASE.
[XBOX 360] ONE OF MY FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UPS IS TREASURE'S RADIANT SILVERGUN. I REMAIN TERRIBLE AT IT, THOUGH.
[PS2] WHILE IT SEEMED LIKE THE GENRE SLOWED DOWN DURING THIS ERA, YOU STILL GOT TRUE CLASSICS LIKE GRADIUS V.
THE SWITCH IS BECOMING MY FAVOURITE CONSOLE, MAINLY BECAUSE IT HAS AN EXCEPTIONAL AMOUNT OF SHMUPS ON IT.

WE LOVE SHMUPS

Readers share their favourite shoot-'em-ups

Francesco Maida
Space Invaders because it was my first shmup on the Atari 2600 and made me feel goose bumps each time an alien ship was running too close to Earth. I couldn't have more respect than this for a game that genuinely scared me to death.

ThatGrumpyGamer
X-OUT for the C64, a shooter where you had to spend money upgrading your ship with better firepower. With three subs to choose from it brought a tactical awareness to the genre.

Commocore
Ikaruga for Dreamcast is one of my favs. The art style, the black and white polarity switching, the XXIII century feel, it keeps me dreaming.

Stephen Llewellyn
Xenon 2 – awesome sound, great graphics and my first introduction to the fab Bitmap Brothers.

Sam Vernon
R-Type – so ahead of its time. The level design, a highly innovative (at the time) gun detachment system, fantastic music, and so many little touches, the way the levels segue into each other especially. Also fiendishly difficult in places, though crucially, never unfair.

Martin Gams
Gradius on the PC Engine... Because it's *Gradius* on the PC Engine. No more arguments required.

Brandon Klopp
Right now I'm completely blown away by *Devil Engine*. Modern, but heavily retro influenced. Do take a look.

Bigdaddyfangs
Gynoug on Mega Drive. Amazing music, great atmosphere and an original setting, and those bosses!

Wayne D
Gorf in the arcade. Played it with my dad when I was a kid. Great take on *Space Invaders*.

BONG DOG
Hell Fire, for that thumping Mega Drive soundtrack, bright, colourful graphics and challenging gameplay.

MAILBAG

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STAR LETTER

OBSCURE TREASURES

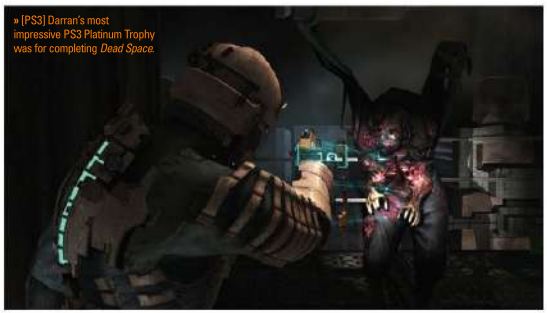
Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've been reading your magazine for years and one thing I really appreciate is that you don't just cover classic games. While it's obviously great to learn how *Banjo-Kazooie* came to be or how the Oliver twins created *Dizzy*, there are plenty more games that deserve coverage.

Take *Rise Of The Robots* for example. It's an absolutely awful game, but its creation remains utterly enthralling to read about and it remains one of my favourite articles from the early days of your magazine. During lockdown I've been paying more attention to games that passed me by on their original release and I've been tracking a number of them down to play, including *The X-Files: Resist And Serve*, *Clock Tower* (that wasn't cheap), *Oink!* and *Sabre Wulf* on GBA.

Now, don't get me wrong, I don't think they're necessarily amazing games, but the stories behind their creation made me greatly enjoy them. I guess what I'm saying is keep the classics coming, but don't be afraid to throw in a curveball every now and then. If you keep throwing them I'll keep trying to catch them.
Many thanks,
David Turner

We're glad you've been enjoying the articles about more obscure games David and we absolutely agree that they deserve their space in the magazine. We've got a few more hidden gems on the way, so hopefully you'll enjoy those as well. Enjoy a free book while you wait for them.

» [ZX Spectrum] As long as freelancers keep pitching curios like *Beatle Quest*, we'll keep covering them in the mag.



» [PS3] Darran's most impressive PS3 Platinum Trophy was for completing *Dead Space*.

SAVE OUR TROPHIES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
With Sony announcing the launch of the fantastic PlayStation 5, I nevertheless received the news with some trepidation.

Why? Well I still avidly use my PS3 and over the years have amassed over 3,500 Trophies for its games, including 41 Platinums. I feel that Sony, in its infinite wisdom, may close down all PS3 activity to concentrate exclusively on the new machine.

It was bad enough that some companies like EA Games closed its servers for internet Trophies – despite them still being incredibly popular with fans – ensuring we could not achieve 100% completion rates for its best-selling titles.

With plenty of games in my collection still to complete and many Trophies yet to collect, any such move by Sony would be a devastating shame. No doubt other PS3 users are feeling the same way.
Yours faithfully,
D O'Conner

The PS5 launch is a little way behind us now (this was clearly lost in the post) but you're probably pleased that most PS3 Trophies still appear to be working. We're not sure how long this will last, but if something does get announced maybe Sony will change its mind like it did with the news that the PS3 store would be closing down. Good luck with completing those final games.

THAT'S FIGHTING TALK

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Mr Biffo's column on his love for the Speccy, and his disdain for other micros, was such a delight! What would retro gaming be without bashing the other side?

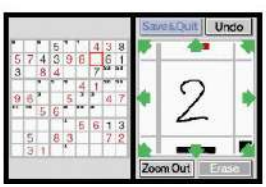
As for my side, I don't have to tell you how great the Super Nintendo was: your readers already voted it the greatest. But let us not forget how envious those Mega Drive owners were! They cried 'blast processing' when we could clearly see how fast *Road Runner* was on our SNES. Like adolescents, they glorified violence, while we had the maturity of caring about gameplay. They boasted better sports games when we had *Ken Griffey, ISS, NCAA Basketball, Striker* and *Super Tennis*.

To the Sega fanboys out there: your 16-bit console was good. But claiming yours was better was living in denial. Face it, you were just jealous of not having *Mario, Zelda* and *Metroid*. And *Final Fantasy*. And *Donkey Kong*. And *Star Fox, Mega Man, Castlevania* and *Contra*. Oh, and

» [Mega Drive] Sega's console might not have had *Metroid* or *Final Fantasy*, but it did have excellent offerings like *Pulseman*.

BRAIN TRAINING

Dear Darran,
I really enjoyed the Brain Games page of **Retro Gamer**, introduced to help keep our minds sharp during the long lockdown days of COVID-19. There is also a true retro element too, as I well remember the numerous competitions featured in the 8-bit and 16-bit related magazines I used to avidly read. Will the Brain Games page return and become a regular column? I certainly hope so!
Yours sincerely,
Stuart Hardy



» [DS] Although we're not currently running puzzles in the magazine, there's plenty of great gaming options like *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training*.

Hi Stuart, we're glad you enjoyed the Brain Games page that we ran, but there aren't currently any plans to revisit it. If we get more requests this could certainly change.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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Sonic was brain-dead platforming, *Streets Of Rage* was a dead genre, and *Phantasy Star* would have been considered a second-rate RPG on Nintendo's system.

There's only one thing where I don't agree with Mr Biffo. It's never the time to end these playground squabbles. I can do this all day!

Robert August de Meijer

It's a brave man who bashes a Sega console, Robert! We're glad you enjoyed your SNES, but we'd argue that both systems are superb with their own strengths and weaknesses. Right, it might be time to go into hiding, we think we can hear an angry mob coming!

ARCADE ACTION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First up, it's so good that postal services to Australia are back to some sort of normal. My regular dose of retro reading drops in the letterbox with regularity as before.

Now, how is this for an idea? (Not that you need more – but anyhow, humour me.) I've just been playing *Planetoid* (Microdeal) on my Dragon 32. A blatant copy of the classic *Defender*. It's not as bad as I remember, but I digress from my point. How about a feature that starts with Eighties classics before the days of official conversions? There were so many titles across the 8-bit home computers that were so important in trying to recreate arcade fun. I'm sure this would create a wonderful sense of nostalgia for us older gamers.

Matt Dickerson

» [C64] Can you guess what C64 *Invaders* is a clone of?

That's a cracking idea Matt and we believe Stuart Campbell wrote something very similar in issue 88. There's lots of scope for articles like this, so we could certainly look at more system specific games going forward.

DAZ DIGS DIG DUG

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've been a big fan for many years. Hot Topic is my favourite new feature and I miss the writing of Paul Davies. I'm writing about a different matter though. On issue 221, page 51, *Dig Dug* gets mentioned in The Unconverted. Much to my disbelief, there is absolutely zero mention about how Darran dislikes *Dig Dug*. I find this to be wholly unacceptable. Perhaps other readers feel the same?

Regards,

Peter Litvin

» [Arcade] Darran's currently planning a *Dig Dug* cover for the game's 40th anniversary. [*Dig Dug* is awesome – Ed]

You're not the only reader who noticed this, Peter. Darran actually loves *Dig Dug* now and tells everyone how great it is. Mind you, he also talks in a slow stilted robotic voice and never drinks or blinks now…

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What multiplayer and party games got everyone laughing (or swearing)?

» [Xbox] *Mashed: Fully Loaded* is a lot of fun and a big hit with readers.

Simon Boggy Burton
Super Monkey Ball games on the GameCube. Immense fun, frustration and falling out (in a good way) all in one expertly designed gameplay package. Sublime.

Jamie 'reech' Walker
Bishi Bashi Special on PS1. Nothing can beat the amount of swearing that game has produced in the history of the universe.

ZX Geoff Owen
Admittedly not a retro game, but the *Jackbox* series of games are always worth playing at parties.

vorn182
Any *Mario Kart* game. Anyone can pick it up and be playing within minutes.

SpectrumNez
Mashed on the PS2! Incredible game with a bunch of friends – like a super violent *Mario Kart*/*Micro Machines* hybrid!

PressPlayonTapeNL
There is no better retro fun than *Bomberman* with four players on the good old NES. I played it a lot with friends in the Nineties, and it was always laid back and competitive at the same time.

Sylvie Soulet
Pokémon Puzzle League on the N64. It can result in some intense sessions, and proves that your game doesn't need the best graphics to be super enjoyable.

Erik Welleweerd
Mashed: Fully Loaded on the original Xbox is simply amazing. And shout out to *Jackbox Party Pack*, because these are awesome as well.

Gareth O Keeffe
Monkey Fight from *Super Monkey Ball* on the GameCube is a brilliant party game. That feeling of catching someone flush with the springy boxing glove to send them flying out of the ring was very satisfying.

Raymond Stewart
I used to play knockout tournaments on the Amiga 500 *Sensible World Of Soccer* with my mates. Fun times.

Rob The Cartoonist
Syndicate Wars on PS1. The number of times we all kept pressing the wrong button and dropped our guns! The only game worth buying the multitap for.

Rev Phil Richardson
Nintendo Land for sure, and in particular Mario Chase, but you can't really beat a bit of *Jackbox Party Pack*.

Cubism
Mario Kart Double Dash!! has led to playing until the wee hours on more than one occasion. In fact, the first time I played it was New Year's 2004, nursing a horrific hangover from a party the night before!

Llama King
Wii Sports. Had quite a few gatherings back in the day playing hours on end.

retro GAMER

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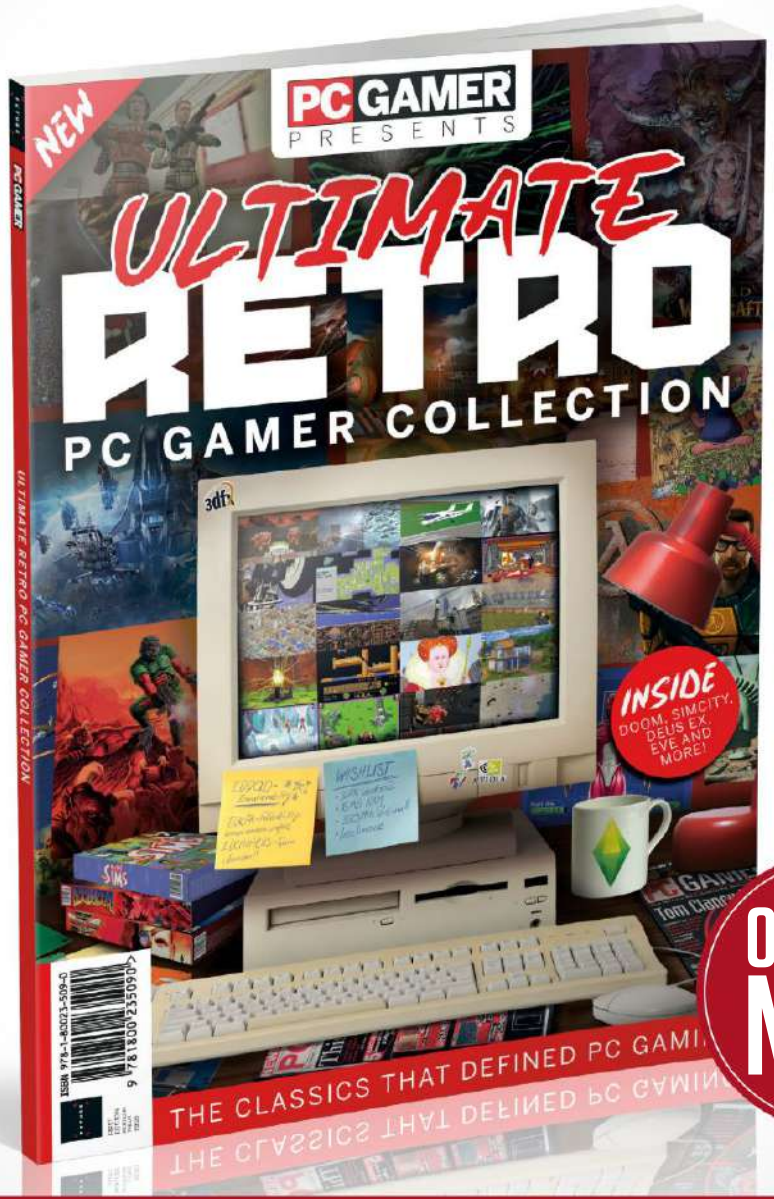

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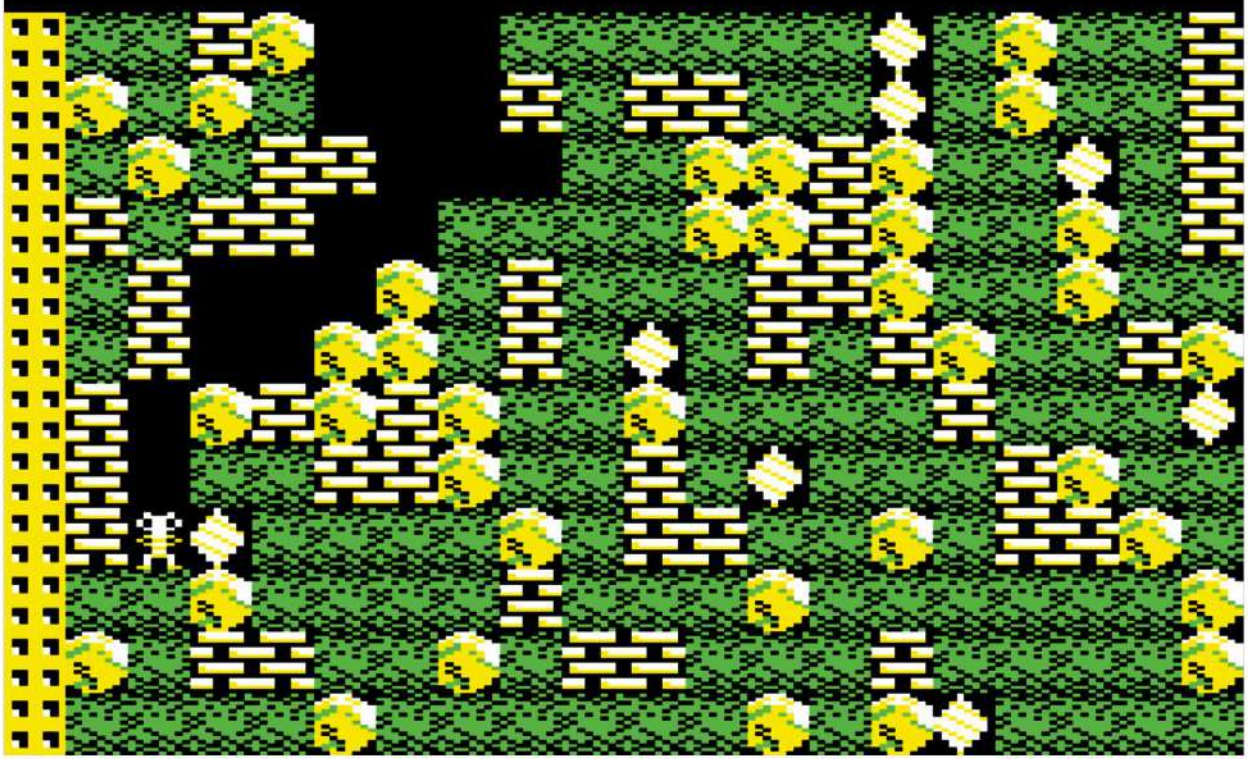

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ENDGAME

HOT CHASE

» For centuries, scholars have wondered what Konami's *Hot Chase* is. Could it be something like *Chase HQ*, but in a warmer climate? Maybe the target is someone attractive, or a person in need of a good ice bath? The consensus was that the truth would never be discovered, but now we have the technology to skip to the end of the game, so that we might glimpse at a slice of reality.

01

» The car has smashed through a barrier and come to a halt. And now, it would appear that the door is opening and someone is going to exit the vehicle. He's a bit far away, but he already looks completely terrifying.

02

» Oh lord, oh no. He's an absolutely hulking, muscular man – the kind that could rip your bones apart like wet tissue paper. But dear reader, it's worse than we feared. He's also got a gun, and he's walking straight toward us.

03

» Suddenly, he turns around and opens fire on the vehicle he's just left. If nothing else, this shows that he's confident that he didn't leave his wallet on the passenger seat or something ridiculous like that. We certainly never would.

04

» Whatever our mysterious meathead is packing must have some serious incendiary capability, as the whole car goes up in a highly dramatic explosion. But what kind of motivation could he have possibly had to destroy the car, which appears like it must have been some form of getaway vehicle?

05

MISSION COMPLETE
YOU HAVE SUCCEEDED IN STEALING
THE ENEMY ARMOURED SUPER CAR
AND HAVE CROSSED THE BORDER
TO FREEDOM
AFTER A FEW DAYS, THE ENEMY
SURRENDERED TO OUR COUNTRY
YOU WILL BE FOREVER REMEMBERED
FOR YOUR BRAVE DEEDS
THANK A MILLION !!

» Oh, so the car belonged to the baddies. And we stole it and trashed it, in the most benevolent, national security enhancing joyride ever to have taken place in wherever the heck this game is set. Good job, Meaty Mike! Your actions rather implausibly managed to completely end this conflict.

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